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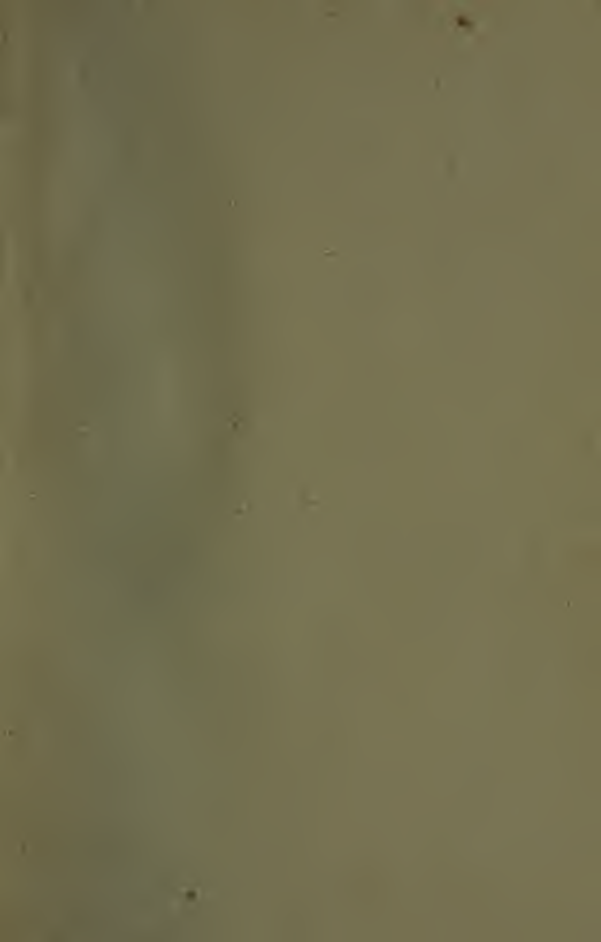
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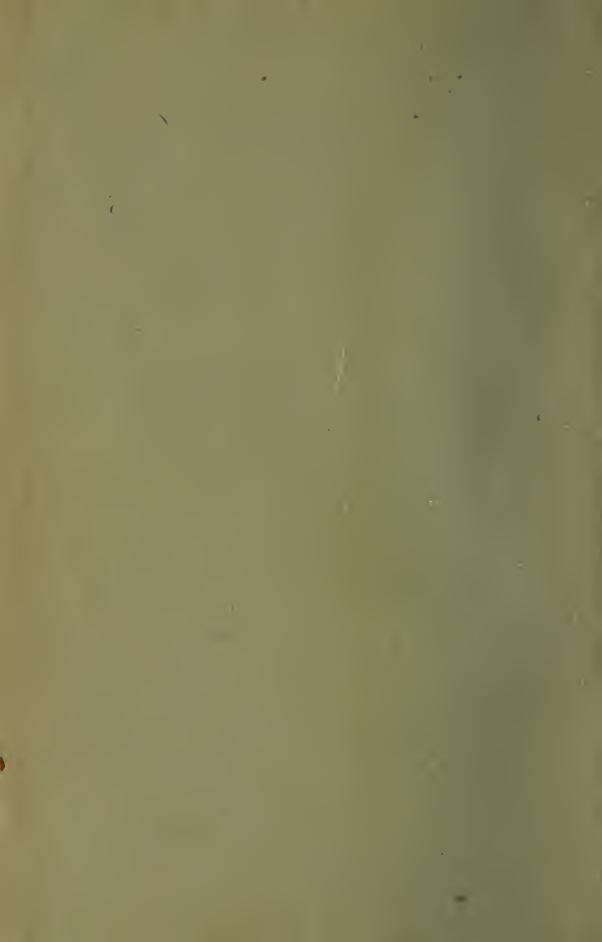
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A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON



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A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON
- R. BROWNING



LONDON AND GLASGOW

COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS

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A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

A TRAGEDY.

PERSONS.

MILDRED TRESHAM.

GUENDOLEN TRESHAM.

THOROLD, Lord Tresham.

AUSTIN TRESHAM.

HENRY, Earl Mertoun.

GERARD.

Other Retainers of Lord Tresham.

TIME, 17—.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*The interior of a Lodge in LORD TRESHAM'S Park. Many Retainers crowded at the window, supposed to command a view of the entrance to his Mansion. GERARD, the Warrener, sitting alone, his back to a table on which are flagons, &c.*

1st Ret. Ay—do—push, friends, and then you'll push down me.

—What for? Does any hear a runner's foot,

Or a steed's trample, or a coach-wheel's
cry

Is the Earl come or his least poursuivant?
But there's no breeding in a man of you
Save Gerard yonder : here's a half-place yet,
Old Gerard !

Ger. Save your courtesies, my friend.
Here is my place.

2nd Ret. Now, Gerard, out with it!
What makes you sullen, this of all the days
I' the year? To-day that, young, rich,
bountiful,
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they
match
With our Lord Tresham thro' the country-
side,

Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our Master's Sister's hand?

Ger. What then?

2nd Ret. What then? Why, you she
speaks to, if she meets.

Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her thro' her forest walks,
You, always favourite for your no-deserts,
You've heard, these three days, how Earl
Mertoun sues

To lay his heart, and house, and broad
lands too,

At Lady Mildred's feet — and while we
squeeze

Ourselves into a mousehole lest we miss

One congee of the least page in his train,
You sit o' one side—"there's the Earl,"
say I—

"What then," say you!

3rd Ret. I'll wager he has let
Both swans he tamed for Lady Mildred,
swim

Over the falls and gain the river!

Ger. Ralph,
Is not to-morrow my inspecting-day
For you and for your hawks?

4th Ret. Let Gerard be!
He's coarse-grained, like his carved black
cross-bow stock.

Ha, look now, while we squabble with him,
look!

Well done, now—is not this beginning, now,
To purpose?

1st Ret. Our retainers look as fine—
That's comfort! Lord, how Richard holds
himself

With his white staff! Will not a knave
behind

Prick him upright?

4th Ret. He's only bowing, fool!
The Earl's man bent-us lower by this much.

1st Ret. That's comfort. Here's a very
cavalcade!

3rd Ret. I don't see wherefore Richard,
and his troop
Of silk and silver varlets there, should find

Their perfumed selves so indispensable
On high days, holy-days! Would it so
disgrace

Our Family, if I, for instance, stood—
In my right hand a cast of Swedish hawks,
A leash of greyhounds in my left?—

Ger. —With Hugh

The logman for supporter—in his right
The bill-hook—in his left the brushwood-
shears!

3rd Ret. Out on you, crab! What next,
what next? The Earl!

1st Ret. Oh, Walter, groom, our horses,
do they match

The Earl's? Alas, that first pair of the
six—

They paw the ground—Ah, Walter! and
that brute

Just on his haunches by the wheel!

6th Ret. Ay—Ay!

You, Philip, are a special hand, I hear,
At soups and sauces—what's a horse to
you?

D'ye mark that beast they've slid into the
midst

So cunningly?—then, Philip, mark this
further;

No leg has he to stand on!

1st Ret. No? That's comfort.

2nd Ret. Peace, Cook! The Earl de-
scends.—Well, Gerard, see

The Earl at least ! Come, there's a proper
man,

I hope ! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or
Swede,

Has got a starrier eye—

3rd Ret.

His eyes are blue—

But leave my hawks alone !

4th Ret.

So young, and yet

So tall and shapely !

5th Ret.

Here's Lord Tresham's self !

There now—there's what a nobleman should
be !

He's older, graver, loftier, he's more like
A House's Head !

2nd Ret.

But you'd not have a boy
—And what's the Earl beside?—possess too
soon

That stateliness ?

1st Ret. Our Master takes his hand—

Richard and his white staff are on the
move—

Back fall our people—(tsh !—there's Timothy
Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties—

And Peter's cursed rosette's a-coming off !)

—At last I see our Lord's back and his
friend's—

And the whole beautiful bright company .

Close round them—in they go !

*[Jumping down from the window-bench,
and making for the table and its jugs,
&c.]* Good health, long life,

Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his
House !

6th Ret. My father drove his father first to
court,

After his marriage-day—ay, did he !

2nd Ret. God bless

Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl !

Here, Gerard, reach your beaker !

Ger. Drink, my boys :

Don't mind me—all's not right about me—
drink !

2nd Ret. [*Aside.*] He's vexed, now, that
he let the show escape !

[*To GER.*] Remember that the Earl returns
this way—

Ger. That way ?

2nd Ret. Just so.

Ger. Then my way's here. [*Goes.*

2nd Ret. Old Gerard

Will die soon—mind, I said it ! He was
used

To care about the pitifullest thing

That touched the House's honour, not an eye

But his could see wherein—and on a cause

Of scarce a quarter this importance, Gerard

Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away

In cares that this was right, nor that was
wrong,

Such a point decorous, and such by rule—

(He knew such niceties, no herald more)

And now—you see his humour : die he will !

2nd Ret. God help him! Who's for the
great servants' hall
To hear what's going on inside! They'd
follow
Lord Tresham into the saloon.

3rd Ret. I!—

4th Ret. I!—

Leave Frank alone for catching, at the door,
Some hint of how the parley goes inside!
Prosperity to the great House once more—
Here's the last drop!

1st Ret. Have at you. Boys,
hurrah!

SCENE II.—*A Saloon in the Mansion.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM, LORD MERTOUN;
AUSTIN, *and* GUENDOLEN.

Tresh. I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet
once more
To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name
—Noble among the noblest in itself,
Yet taking in your person, fame avers,
New price and lustre,—(as that gem you
wear,
Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,
Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last
lord,
Seems to re-kindle at the core)—your name
Would win you welcome!—

Mer.

Thanks!

Tresh.

—But add to that,

The worthiness and grace and dignity
Of your proposal for uniting both
Our Houses even closer than respect
Unites them now—add these, and you must
grant

One favour more, nor that the least,—to
think

The welcome I should give;—'tis given!

My lord,

My only brother, Austin—he's the King's.
Our cousin, Lady Guendolen—betrothed
To Austin: all are yours.

Mer.

I thank you—less

For the expressed commendings, which your
seal,

And only that, authenticates—forbids

My putting from me . . . to my heart I
take

Your praise . . . but praise less claims my
gratitude,

Than the indulgent insight it implies

Of what must needs be uppermost with one

Who comes, like me, with the bare leave
to ask,

In weighed and measured unimpassioned
words,

A gift, which, if as calmly 'tis denied,

He must withdraw, content upon his cheek,

Despair within his soul:—that I dare ask

Firmly, near boldly, near with confidence
That gift, I have to thank you.—Yes, Lord
Tresham,

I love your sister—as you'd have one love
That lady . . . oh more, more I love her!

Wealth,
Rank, all the world thinks *me*, they're yours,
you know,
To hold or part with, at your choice—but
grant

My true self, *me* without a rood of land,
A piece of gold, a name of yesterday,
Grant me that lady, and you . . . Death
or life?

Guen. [*Apart to Aus.*] Why, this is
loving, Austin!

Aus. He's so young!

Guen. Young? Old enough, I think, to
half surmise

He never had obtained an entrance here,
Were all this fear and trembling needed.

Aus. Hush!

He reddens.

Guen. Mark him, Austin; that's
true love!

Ours must begin again.

Tresh. We'll sit, my lord.

Ever with best desert goes diffidence.
I may speak plainly nor be misconceived.
That I am wholly satisfied with you
On this occasion, when a falcon's eye

Were dull compared with mine to search out
faults,

Is somewhat. Mildred's hand is hers to give
Or to refuse.

Mer. But you, you grant my suit?
I have your word if hers?

Tresh. My best of words
If hers encourage you. I trust it will.

Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way?

Mer. I . . . I . . . our two demesnes,
remember, touch—

I have been used to wander carelessly
After my stricken game—the heron roused
Deep in my woods, has trailed its broken
wing

Thro' thickets and glades a mile in yours,—
or else

Some eyass ill-reclaimed has taken flight
And lured me after her from tree to tree,
I marked not whither . . . I have come
upon

The Lady's wondrous beauty unaware,
And—and then . . . I have seen her.

Guen. [*Aside to Aus.*] Note that mode
Of faltering out that when a lady passed
He, having eyes, did see her! You had
said—

“On such a day I scanned her, head to foot ;

“Observed a red, where red should not have
been,

“Outside her elbow ; but was pleased enough

“Upon the whole.” Let such irreverent talk
Be lessoned for the future !

Tresh. What’s to say
May be said briefly. She has never known
A mother’s care ; I stand for father too.
Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems—
You cannot know the good and tender heart,
Its girl’s trust, and its woman’s constancy,
How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
As light where friends are—how embued
with lore

The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
The . . . one might know I talked of
Mildred—thus

We brothers talk !

Mer. . I thank you.

Tresh. In a word,
Control’s not for this lady ; but her wish
To please me outstrips in its subtlety
My power of being pleased—herself creates
The want she means to satisfy. My heart
Prefers your suit to her as ’twere its own.
Can I say more ?

Mer. No more—thanks, thanks—
no more !

Tresh. This matter then discussed . . .

Mer. . . . We’ll waste no breath
On aught less precious—I’m beneath the roof
That holds her : while I thought of that, my
speech

To you would wander—as it must not do,
 Since as you favour me I stand or fall.

I pray you suffer that I take my leave !

Tresh. With less regret 'tis suffered, that
 again

We meet, I hope, so shortly.

Mer. We ? again ?—

Ah yes, forgive me—when shall . . . you
 will crown

Your goodness by forthwith apprising me

When . . . if . . . the Lady will appoint
 a day

For me to wait on you—and her.

Tresh. So soon

As I am made acquainted with her thoughts

On your proposal—howsoe'er they lean—

A messenger shall bring you the result.

Mer. You cannot bind me more to you,
 my lord.

Farewell till we renew . . . I trust, renew

A converse ne'er to disunite again.

Tresh. So may it prove !

Mer. You, Lady, you, Sir, take

My humble salutation

Guen. and Aus. Thanks !

Tresh. Within there !

[*Servants enter.* TRESHAM conducts
 MERTOUN to the door. Meantime AUSTIN
 remarks,

Well,

Here I have an advantage of the Earl,

Confess now! I'd not think that all was
safe

Because my lady's brother stood my friend.
Why, he makes sure of her—"do you say,
yes—

"She'll not say, no"—what comes it to
beside?

I should have prayed the brother, "speak
this speech,

"For Heaven's sake urge this on her—
put in this—

"Forget not, as you'd save me, t'other
thing,—

"Then set down what she says, and how she
looks,

"And if she smiles," and (in an under
breath)

"Only let her accept me, and do you

"And all the world refuse me, if you dare!"

Guen. That way you'd take, friend
Austin? What a shame

I was your cousin tamely from the first

Your bride, and all this fervour's run to
waste!

Do you know you speak sensibly to-day?

The Earl's a fool.

Aus. Here's Thorold. Tell him so!

Tresh. [*Returning.*] Now, voices, voices!

'St! the lady's first!

How seems he?—seems he not . . . come,
faith give fraud

The mercy-stroke whenever they engage !
Down with fraud—up with faith ! How
seems the Earl ?

A name ! a blazon ! if you knew their worth,
As you will never ! come—the Earl ?

Guen. He's young.

Tresh. What's she ? an infant save in heart
and brain.

Young ! Mildred is fourteen, remark ! And
you . . .

Austin, how old is she ?

Guen. There's tact for you !

I meant that being young was good excuse
If one should tax him . . .

Tresh. Well ?

Guen. —With lacking wit.

Tresh. He lacked wit ? Where might he
lack wit, so please you ?

Guen. In standing straighter than the
steward's rod

And making you the tiresomest harangues,
Instead of slipping over to my side
And softly whispering in my ear, " Sweet
lady,

" Your cousin there will do me detriment

" He little dreams of—he's absorbed, I see,

" In my old name and fame—be sure he'll
leave

" My Mildred, when his best account of me

" Is ended, in full confidence I wear

" My grandsire's periwig down either cheek.

"I'm lost unless your gentleness vouchsafes" . . .

Tresh. . . . "To give a best of best accounts, yourself,

"Of me and my demerits." You are right!

He should have said what now I say for him.

You golden creature, will you help us all?

Here's Austin means to vouch for much, but
you

—You are . . . what Austin only knows!

Come up,

All three of us—she's in the Library

No doubt, for the day's wearing fast.

Precede!

Guen. Austin, how we must—!

Tresh. Must what? Must speak truth,
Malignant tongue! Detect one fault in him!
I challenge you!

Guen. Witchcraft's a fault in him,
For you're bewitched.

Tresh. What's urgent we obtain
Is, that she soon receive him—say, to-morrow—

Next day at farthest.

Guen. Ne'er instruct me!

Tresh. Come!

—He's out of your good graces since,
forsooth,

He stood not as he'd carry us by storm

With his perfections! You're for the
composed,

Manly, assured, becoming confidence!

—Get her to say, “to-morrow,” and

I’ll give you . . .

I’ll give you black Urganda, to be spoiled

With petting and snail-paces. Will you?

Come!

SCENE III.—MILDRED’S *Chamber*. *A painted window overlooks the park.* MILDRED and GUENDOLEN.

Guen. Now, Mildred, spare those pains.

I have not left

Our talkers in the Library, and climbed

The wearisome ascent to this your bower

In company with you,—I have not dared . . .

Nay, worked such prodigies as sparing you

Lord Mertoun’s pedigree before the flood,

Which Thorold seemed in very act to tell—

—Or bringing Austin to pluck up that most

Firm-rooted heresy—your suitor’s eyes,

He would maintain, were gray instead of

blue—

I think I brought him to contrition!—Well,

I have not done such things, (all to deserve

A minute’s quiet cousin’s-talk with you,)

To be dismissed so coolly!

Mil.

Guendolen,

What have I done . . . what could suggest . . .

Guen. There, there !

Do I not comprehend you'd be alone
To throw those testimonies in a heap,
Thorold's enlargings, Austin's brevities,
With that poor, silly, heartless Guendolen's
Ill-timed, misplaced, attempted smartnesses—
And sift their sense out? now, I come to
 spare you
Nearly a whole night's labour. Ask and
 have !

Demand, be answered ! Lack I ears and
 eyes ?

Am I perplexed which side of the rock-table
The Conqueror dined on when he landed
 first,

Lord Mertoun's ancestor was bidden take—
The bow-hand or the arrow-hand's great
 meed ?

Mildred, the Earl has soft blue eyes !

Mil. My brother—

Did he . . . you said that he received him
 well ?

Guen. If I said only "well" I said not
 much—

Oh, stay—which brother ?

Mil. Thorold ! who—who else ?

Guen. Thorold (a secret) is too proud by
 half,—

Nay, hear me out—with us he's even gentler
Than we are with our birds. Of this great
 House

The least retainer that e'er caught his glance
 Would die for him, real dying—no mere talk :
 And in the world, the court, if men would cite
 The perfect spirit of honour, Thorold's name
 Rises of its clear nature to their lips :
 But he should take men's homage, trust in it,
 And care no more about what drew it down.
 He has desert, and that, acknowledgment ;
 Is he content ?

Mil. You wrong him, Guendolen.

Guen. He's proud, confess ; so proud with
 brooding o'er
 The light of his interminable line,
 An ancestry with men all paladins,
 And women all . . .

Mil. Dear Guendolen, 'tis late !
 When yonder purple pane the climbing moon
 Pierces, I know 'tis midnight.

Guen. Well, that Thorold
 Should rise up from such musings and receive
 One come audaciously to graft himself
 Into this peerless stock, yet find no flaw,
 No slightest spot in such an one. . . .

Mil. Who finds
 A spot in Mertoun ?

Guen. Not your brother ; there-
 fore,
 Not the whole world.

Mil. I'm weary, Guendolen.—
 Bear with me !

Guen. I am foolish.

Mil.

Oh, no, kind—

But I would rest.

Guen. Good night and rest to you.I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair?*Mil.*

Brown hair !

Guen. Brown? why it ~~is~~ brown—how could
you know that?*Mil.* How? did not you—Oh, Austin
'twas, declaredHis hair was light, not brown—my head!—
and, look,

The moon-beam purpling the dark chamber !

Sweet,

Good night !

Guen. Forgive me—sleep the soundlier
for me ![*Going, she turns suddenly.*

Mildred !

Perdition ! all's discovered.—Thorold finds
—That the Earl's greatest of all grand-
mothersWas grander daughter still—to that fair
dameWhose garter slipped down at the famous
dance ![*Goes.**Mil.* Is she—can she be really gone at
last ?My heart—I shall not reach the window !
Needs

Must I have sinned much, so to suffer !

[She lifts the small lamp which is suspended before the Virgin's image in the window, and places it by the purple pane. There !

[She returns to the seat in front.

Mildred and Mertoun ! Mildred, with consent
Of all the world and Thorold,—Mertoun's
bride !

Too late ! 'Tis sweet to think of, sweeter
still

To hope for, that this blessed end soothes up
The curse of the beginning ; but I know
It comes too late—'twill sweetest be of all
To dream my soul away and die upon !

[A noise without.

The voice ! Oh ! why, why glided sin the
snake

Into the Paradise Heaven meant us both ?

[The window opens softly.—A low voice sings.

There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's so purer
than the purest ;

And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her
sure faith's the surest :

And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on
depth of lustre

Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier
than the wild-grape cluster,

Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-
misted marble :

Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling,
the bird's warble !

[A figure wrapped in a mantle appears at the window.

And this woman says, " My days were sunless and
 my nights were moonless,
 " Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's
 heart's outbreak tuneless,
 " If you loved me not ! " And I who—(ah, for words
 of flame !) adore her !
 Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably
 before her—

*[He enters—approaches her seat, and bends
 over her.]*

I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice
 takes me,
 And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as
 hers she makes me !

*[The Earl throws off his slouched hat and long
 cloak.]*

My very heart sings, so I sing, beloved !

Mil. Sit, Henry—do not take my hand.

Mer. 'Tis mine !

The meeting that appalled us both so much
 Is ended.

Mil. What begins now ?

Mer. Happiness

Such as the world contains not.

Mil. That is it.

Our happiness would, as you say, exceed
 The whole world's best of blisses : we—do
 we

Deserve that ? Utter to your soul, what
 mine

Long since, beloved, has grown used to hear,
 Like a death-knell, so much regarded once,

And so familiar now ; this will not be !

Mer. Oh, Mildred, have I met your
brother's face,

Compelled myself—if not to speak untruth,
Yet to disguise, to shun, to put aside

The truth, as what had e'er prevailed on me
Save you, to venture? Have I gained at
last

Your brother, the one scarer of your dreams,
And waking thoughts' sole apprehension
too?

Does a new life, like a young sunrise, break
On the strange unrest of our night, confused
With rain and stormy flaw—and will you see
No dripping blossoms, no fire-tinted drops
On each live spray, no vapour steaming up,
And no expressless glory in the east?

When I am by you, to be ever by you,
When I have won you and may worship you,
Oh, Mildred, can you say "this will not be?"

Mil. Sin has surprised us ; so will punish-
ment.

Mer. No—me alone, who sinned alone !

Mil. The night

You likened our past life to—was it storm
Throughout to you then, Henry?

Mer. Of your life

I spoke—what am I, what my life, to waste
A thought about when you are by me?—
you

It was, I said my folly called the storm

And pulled the night upon.—'Twas day
with me—

Perpetual dawn with me.

Mil. Come what, come will,
You have been happy—take my hand!

Mer. [*After a pause.*] How good
Your brother is! I figured him a cold—
Shall I say, haughty man?

Mil. They told me all.
I know all.

Mer. It will soon be over.

Mil. Over?
Oh, what is over? what must I live thro'
And say, "'tis over?" Is our meeting over?
Have I received in presence of them all
The partner of my guilty love,—with brow
Trying to seem a maiden's brow—with lips
Which make believe that when they strive
to form

Replies to you and tremble as they strive,
It is the nearest ever they approached
A stranger's . . . Henry, yours that stranger's
. . . lip—

With cheek that looks a virgin's, and that
is . . .

Ah, God! some prodigy of thine will stop
This planned piece of deliberate wickedness
In its birth even—some fierce leprous spot
Will mar the brows dissimulating—I
Shall murmur no smooth speeches got by
heart,

But, frenzied, pour forth all our woeful
story,

The love, the shame, and the despair—with
them

Round me aghast as men round some cursed
fount

That should spirt water, and spouts blood.
I'll not

. . . Henry, you do not wish that I should
draw

This vengeance down? I'll not affect a grace
That's gone from me—gone once, and gone
for ever!

Mer. Mildred, my honour is your own.
I'll share

Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself.

A word informs your brother I retract

This morning's offer; time will yet bring
forth

Some better way of saving both of us.

Mil. I'll meet their faces, Mertoun!

Mer. When? to-morrow

Get done with it!

Mil. Oh, Henry, not to-morrow!

Next day! I never shall prepare my words
And looks and gestures sooner!—How you
must

Despise me!

Mer. Mildred, break it if you choose,

A heart the love of you uplifted—still

Uplifts, thro' this protracted agony,

To Heaven ! but, Mildred, answer me,—first
pace

The chamber with me—once again—now, say
Calmly the part, the . . . what it is of me
You see contempt (for you did say contempt)
—Contempt for you in ! I would pluck it off
And cast it from me !—but no—no, you'll
not

Repeat that?—will you, Mildred, repeat
that?

Mil. Dear Henry—

Mer. I was scarce a boy—
e'en now

What am I more ? And you were infantine
When first I met you—why, your hair fell
loose

On either side !—my fool's cheek reddens
now

Only in the recalling how it burned
That morn to see the shape of many a dream
—You know we boys are prodigal of charms
To her we dream of—I had heard of one,
Had dreamed of her, and I was close to
her,

Might speak to her, might live and die her
own,

Who knew?—I spoke—Oh, Mildred, feel
you not

That now, while I remember every glance
Of yours, each word of yours, with power
to test

And weigh them in the diamond scales of
Pride,

Resolved the treasure of a first and last
Heart's love shall have been bartered at its
worth,

—That now I think upon your purity
And utter ignorance of guilt—your own
Or other's guilt—the girlish undisguised
Delight at a strange novel prize—(I talk
A silly language, but interpret, you !)
If I, with fancy at its full, and reason
Scarce in its germ, enjoined you secrecy,
If you had pity on my passion, pity
On my protested sickness of the soul
To sit beside you, hear you breathe, and
watch

Your eyelids and the eyes beneath—if you
Accorded gifts and knew not they were
gifts—

If I grew mad at last with enterprise
And must behold my beauty in her bower
Or perish—(I was ignorant of even
My own desires—what then were you ?) if
sorrow—

Sin—if the end came—must I now renounce
My reason, blind myself to light, say truth
Is false and lie to God and my own soul ?
Contempt were all of this !

Mil.

Do you believe . . .

Or, Henry, I'll not wrong you—you believe
That I was ignorant. I scarce grieve o'er

The past ! We'll love on—you will love me
still !

Mer. Oh, to love less what one has
injured ! Dove,

Whose pinion I have rashly hurt, my
breast—

Shall my heart's warmth not nurse thee into
strength ?

Flower I have crushed, shall I not care for
thee ?

Bloom o'er my crest my fight-mark and
device !

Mildred, I love you and you love me !

Mil. Go !

Be that your last word. I shall sleep to-
night.

Mer. This is not our last meeting ?

Mil. One night more.

Mer. And then—think, then !

Mil. Then, no sweet courtship-days,
No dawning consciousness of love for us,
No strange and palpitating births of sense
From words and looks, no innocent fears and
hopes,

Reserves and confidences: morning's over !

Mer. How else should love's perfected
noontide follow ?

All the dawn promised shall the day perform.

Mil. So may it be ! but——

You are cautious, love ?

Are sure that unobserved you scaled the walls ?

Mer. Oh, trust me ! Then our final meeting's fixed ?

To-morrow night ?

Mil. Farewell ! Stay, Henry
 . . . wherefore ?

His foot is on the yew-tree bough—the turf
 Receives him—now the moonlight as he runs
 Embraces him—but he must go—is gone—
 Ah, once again he turns—thanks, thanks,
 my love !

He's gone—Oh, I'll believe him every word !
 I was so young—I loved him so—I had
 No mother—God forgot me—and I fell.
 There may be pardon yet—all's doubt
 beyond.

Surely the bitterness of death is past !

ACT II.

SCENE.—*The Library.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM hastily.

This way—In, Gerard, quick !

[*As GERARD enters TRESHAM secures
 the door.*

Now speak ! or, wait—
 I'll bid you speak directly. [*Sits himself.*

Now repeat
 Firmly and circumstantially the tale

You've just now told me; it eludes me;
either

I did not listen, or the half is gone

Away from me—How long have you lived
here?

Here in my house, your father kept our
woods

Before you?

Ger. —As his father did, my lord.

I have been eating sixty years, almost,

Your bread.

Tresh. Yes, yes—You ever were of all
The servants in my father's house, I know,
The trusted one. You'll speak the truth.

Ger. I'll speak

God's truth: night after night . . .

Tresh. Since when?

Ger. At least

A month—each midnight has some man
access

To Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. Tush, "access"—

No wide words like "access" to me!

Ger. He runs

Along the woodside, crosses to the south,

Takes the left tree that ends the avenue . . .

Tresh. The last great yew-tree?

Ger. You might stand upon

The main boughs like a platform . . . Then
he . . .

Tresh. Quick!

Ger. . . . Climbs up, and, where they
lessen at the top,
—I cannot see distinctly, but he throws,
I think—for this I do not vouch—a line
That reaches to the Lady's casement—

Tresh. —Which
He enters not! Gerard—some wretched fool
Dares pry into my sister's privacy!
When such are young, it seems a precious
thing
To have approached,—to merely have ap-
proached,
Got sight of, the abode of her they set
Their frantic thoughts upon! He does not
enter?

Gerard?

Ger. There is a lamp that's full in the
midst,
Under a red square in the painted glass
Of Lady Mildred's . . .

Tresh. Leave that name out! Well?
That lamp?

Ger. Is moved at midnight higher up
To one pane—a small dark-blue pane—he
waits

For that among the boughs; at sight of
that,

I see him, plain as I see you, my lord,
Open the Lady's casement, enter there . . .

Tresh. —And stay?

Ger. An hour, two hours.

Tresh. And this you saw
Once?—twice?—quick!

Ger. Twenty times.

Tresh. And what brings you
Under the yew-trees?

Ger. The first night I left
My range so far, to track the stranger
stag
That broke the pale, I saw the man.

Tresh. Yet sent
No cross-bow shaft thro' the marauder?

Ger. But
He came, my lord, the first time he was
seen,

In a great moonlight, light as any day,
From Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresh. [*After a pause.*] You have no
cause—
—Who could have cause to do my sister
wrong?

Ger. Oh, my lord, only once—let me this
once
Speak what is on my mind! Since first I
noted

All this, I've groaned as if a fiery net
Plucked me this way and that—fire, if I
turned

To her, fire if I turned to you, and fire,
If down I flung myself and strove to die.
The lady could not have been seven years old
When I was trusted to conduct her safe

Thro' the deer-herd to stroke the snow-white
fawn

I brought to eat bread from her tiny hand
Within a month. She ever had a smile
To greet me with—she . . . if it could undo
What's done to lop each limb from off this
trunk . . .

All that is foolish talk, not fit for you—
I mean, I could not speak and bring her
hurt

For Heaven's compelling: but when I was
fixed

To hold my peace, each morsel of your food
Eaten beneath your roof, my birthplace too,
Choked me. I wish I had grown mad in
doubts

What it behoved me do. This morn it
seemed

Either I must confess to you, or die:
Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm
That crawls, to have betrayed my Lady!

Tresh.

No—

No—Gerard!

Ger. Let me go!

Tresh.

A man, you say—

What man? Young? Not a vulgar hind?
What dress?

Ger. A slouched hat and a large dark
foreign cloak

Wraps his whole form: even his face is
hid;

But I should judge him young ; no hind, be
sure !

Tresh. Why ?

Ger. He is ever armed : his sword
projects

Beneath the cloak.

Tresh. Gerard,—I will not say
No word, no breath of this !

Ger. Thanks, thanks, my lord !
[*Goes.*

[*TRESHAM paces the room. After a pause,*
Oh, thought's absurd !—as with some
monstrous fact

That, when ill thoughts beset us, seems to
give

Merciful God that made the sun and stars,
The waters and the green delights of earth,
The lie ! I apprehend the monstrous fact—
Yet know the Maker of all worlds is good,
And yield my reason up, inadequate
To reconcile what yet I do behold—
Blasting my sense ! There's cheerful day
outside—

This is my library—and this the chair
My father used to sit in carelessly,
After his soldier-fashion, while I stood
Between his knees to question him—and
here,

Gerard, our gray retainer,—as he says,
Fed with our food from sire to son an
age,—

Has told a story—I am to believe!
 That Mildred . . . oh, no, no! both tales
 are true,
 Her pure cheek's story and the forester's!
 Would she, or could she, err—much less,
 confound
 All guilts of treachery, of craft, of . . .
 Heaven

Keep me within its hand!—I will sit here
 Until thought settles and I see my course.
 Avert, oh God, only this woe from me!

*[As he sinks his head between his arms on
 the table, GUENDOLEN'S voice is heard at
 the door.]*

Lord Tresham! *[She knocks.]* Is Lord
 Tresham there?

*[TRESHAM, hastily turning, pulls down the
 first book above him and opens it.]*

Tresh. Come in! *[She enters.]*

Ah, Guendolen—good morning.

Guen. Nothing more?

Tresh. What should I say more?

Guen. Pleasant question! more?

This more! Did I besiege poor Mildred's
 brain

Last night till close on morning with "the
 Earl"—

"The Earl"—whose worth did I asseverate
 Till I am very fain to hope that . . . Thorold,
 What is all this? You are not well!

Tresh.

Who, I?

You laugh at me.

Guen. Has what I'm fain to hope
Arrived, then? Does that huge tome show
some blot

In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
Than Arthur's time?

Tresh. When left you Mildred's
chamber?

Guen. Oh late enough, I told you! The
main thing

To ask is, how I left her chamber,—sure,
Content yourself, she'll grant this paragon
Of Earls no such ungracious . . .

Tresh. Send her here!

Guen. Thorold?

Tresh. I mean—acquaint her, Guen-
dolen—

—But mildly!

Guen. Mildly?

Tresh. Ah, you guess'd aright!

I am not well—there is no hiding it.

But tell her I would see her at her leisure—

That is, at once! here in the Library!

The passage in that old Italian book

We hunted for so long is found, say,—
found—

And if I let it slip again . . . you see,

That she must come—and instantly!

Guen. I'll die

Piecemeal, record that, if there have not
gloomed

Some blot i' the 'scutcheon !

Tresh.

Go ! or, Guendolen,

Be you at call,—with Austin, if you choose,—
In the adjoining gallery—There, go !

[GUENDOLEN *goes.*

Another lesson to me ! you might bid
A child disguise his heart's sore, and conduct
Some sly investigation point by point
With a smooth brow, as well as bid me
catch

The inquisitorial cleverness some praise !

If you had told me yesterday, " There's one
" You needs must circumvent and practise
with,

" Entrap by policies, if you would worm

" The truth out—and that one is—Mildred ! "

There—

There—reasoning is thrown away on it !

Prove she's unchaste . . . why you may
after prove

That she's a poisoner, traitress, what you
will !

Where I can comprehend nought, nought's
to say,

Or do, or think ! Force on me but the first
Abomination,—then outpour all plagues,
And I shall ne'er make count of them !

Enter MILDRED.

Mil.

What book

Is it I wanted, Thorold ? Guendolen

Thought you were pale—you are not pale!
That book?

That's Latin surely!

Tresh. Mildred—here's a line—
(Don't lean on me—I'll English it for you)

“Love conquers all things.” What love
conquers them?

What love should you esteem—best love?

Mil. True love.

Tresh. I mean, and should have said,
whose love is best

Of all that love or that profess to love?

Mil. The list's so long—there's father's,
mother's, husband's . . .

Tresh. Mildred, I do believe a brother's
love

For a sole sister must exceed them all!

For see now, only see! there's no alloy

Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold

Of other loves—no gratitude to claim;

You never gave her life—not even aught

That keeps life—never tended her, instructed,

Enriched her—so your love can claim no
right

O'er hers save pure love's claim—that's what
I call

Freedom from earthliness. You'll never hope

To be such friends, for instance, she and you,

As when you hunted cowslips in the woods,

Or played together in the meadow hay,

Oh yes—with age, respect comes, and your
worth

Is felt, there's growing sympathy of tastes,
 There's ripened friendship, there's confirmed
 esteem,
 —Much head these make against the new-
 comer !
 The startling apparition—the strange youth—
 Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or,
 say,
 Mere gazing at, shall change (beyond all
 change
 This Ovid ever sang about !) your soul
 . . . *Her* soul, that is,—the sister's soul !
 With her
 'Twas winter yesterday ; now, all is warmth,
 The green leaf's springing and the turtle's
 voice,
 “ Arise and come away ! ” Come whither ?
 —far
 Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
 The brother's somewhat insignificant
 Array of rights ! all which he knows before—
 Has calculated on so long ago !
 I think such love, (apart from yours and
 mine,)
 Contented with its little term of life,
 Intending to retire betimes, aware
 How soon the background must be place
 for it,
 I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds
 All the world's loves in its unworldliness.
 Mil. What is this for ?

Tresh.

This, Mildred, is it for !
Oh, no, I cannot go to it so soon !

That's one of many points my haste left out—
Each day, each hour throws forth its silk-
slight film

Between the being tied to you by birth,
And you, until those slender threads compose
A web that shrouds her daily life of hopes
And fears and fancies, all her life, from
yours—

So close you live and yet so far apart !
And must I rend this web, tear up, break
down

The sweet and palpitating mystery
That makes her sacred? You—for you I
mean,

Shall I speak—Shall I not speak?

Mil.

Speak !

Tresh.

I will.

Is there a story men could—any man
Could tell of you, you would conceal from me?
I'll never think there's falsehood on that lip !
Say, "There is no such story men could
tell,"

And I'll believe you, tho' I disbelieve
The world . . . the world of better men
than I,

And women such as I suppose you—Speak !
[*After a pause.*] Not speak? Explain then !
clear it up, then ! Move
Some of the miserable weight away

That presses lower than the grave! Not
speak?

Some of the dead weight, Mildred! Ah, if I
Could bring myself to plainly make their
charge

Against you! Must I, Mildred? Silent
still?

[*After a pause.*] Is there a gallant that has
night by night

Admittance to your chamber?

[*After a pause.*] Then, his name!

Till now, I only had a thought for you—

But now,—his name!

Mil. Thorold, do you devise

Fit expiation for my guilt, if fit

There be! 'tis nought to say that I'll endure
And bless you,—that my spirit yearns to
purge

Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire—

But do not plunge me into other guilt!

Oh, guilt enough! I cannot tell his name.

Tresh. Then judge yourself! How should
I act? Pronounce!

Mil. Oh, Thorold, you must never tempt
me thus!

To die here in this chamber by that sword
Would seem like punishment—so should I
glide

Like an arch-cheat, into extremest bliss!

'Twere easily arranged for me! but you—
What would become of you?

Tresh. And what will now
Become of me? I'll hide your shame and
mine
From every eye; the dead must heave their
hearts
Under the marble of our chapel-floor;
They cannot rise and blast you! You may
wed
Your paramour above our mother's tomb;
Our mother cannot move from 'neath your
foot.
We two will somehow wear this one day
out:
But with to-morrow hastens here—the Earl!
The youth without suspicion that faces come
From Heaven, and hearts from . . . whence
proceed such hearts?
I have despatched last night at your com-
mand
A missive bidding him present himself
To-morrow here—thus much is said—the
rest
Is understood as if 'twere written down—
“His suit finds favour in your eyes,”—now
dictate
This morning's letter that shall countermand
Last night's—do dictate that!
Mil. But, Thorold—if
I will receive him as I said?
Tresh. *The Earl?*
Mil. I will receive him!

Tresh. [*Starting up.*] Ho there! Guendolen!

GUENDOLEN and AUSTIN enter.

And, Austin, you are welcome too! Look there!

The woman there!

Aus. and Guen. How? Mildred?

Tresh. Mildred once!

Now the receiver night by night, when sleep
Blesses the inmates of her father's house,
—I say, the soft sly wanton that receives
Her guilt's accomplice 'neath this roof which
holds

You, Guendolen, you, Austin, and has held
A thousand Treshams—never one like her!
No lighter of the signal lamp her quick
Foul breath near quenches in hot eagerness
To mix with breath as foul! no loosener
Of the lattice, practised in the stealthy
tread,

The low voice and the noiseless come-and-go!

Not one composer of the Bacchant's mien
Into—what you thought Mildred's, in a
word!

Know her!

Guen. Oh, Mildred, look to me, at least!
Thorold—she's dead, I'd say, but that she
stands

Rigid as stone and whiter!

Tresh. You have heard . . .

Guen. Too much ! you must proceed on further !

Mil. Yes—

Proceed—All's truth ! Go from me !

Tresh. All is truth,

She tells you ! Well, you know, or ought to know,

All this I would forgive in her. I'd con
Each precept the harsh world enjoins, I'd take
Our ancestors' stern verdicts one by one,
I'd bind myself before them to exact
The prescribed vengeance—and one word
of hers,

The sight of her, the bare least memory
Of Mildred, my one sister, my heart's pride
Above all prides, my all in all so long,
Had scattered every trace of my resolve !
What were it silently to waste away
And see her waste away from this day forth,
Two scathed things with leisure to repent,
And grow acquainted with the grave, and die,
Tired out if not at peace, and be forgotten ?
It were not so impossible to bear !

But this—that, fresh from last night's pledge
renewed

Of love with the successful gallant there,
She'll calmly bid me help her to entice,
Inveigle an unconscious trusting youth
Who thinks her all that's chaste, and good,
and pure,

—Invite me to betray him . . . who so fit
As honour's self to cover shame's arch-deed?
—That she'll receive Lord Mertoun—(her
own phrase)—
This, who could bear? Why, you have
heard of thieves,
Stabbers, the earth's disgrace—who yet have
laughed,
“Talk not of tortures to me—I'll betray
“No comrade I've pledged faith to!”—you
have heard
“Of wretched women—all but Mildreds—
tied
By wild illicit ties to losels vile
You'd tempt them to forsake; and they'll
reply
“Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I
have
“In him, why should I leave him then for
gold,
“Repute, or friends?”—and you have felt
your heart
Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
As to so many friends; bad as you please,
You've felt they were God's men and women
still,
So not to be disowned by you! but she,
That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
Their intercourse the surelier! and, for this,
I curse her to her face before you all!

Shame hunt her from the earth! Then
Heaven do right
To both! It hears me now—shall judge
her then!

[*As MILDRED faints and falls, TRESHAM
rushes out.*

Aus. Stay, Tresham, we'll accompany
you!

Guen. We?

What, and leave Mildred? We? why,
where's my place

But by her side, and where's yours but by
mine?

Mildred—one word—only look at me, then!

Aus. No, Guendolen! I echo Thorold's
voice!

She is unworthy to behold . . .

Guen. Us two?

If you spoke on reflection, and if I
Approved your speech—if you (to put the
thing

At lowest) you, the soldier, bound to make
The King's cause yours, and fight for it,
and throw

Regard to others of its right or wrong,
—If with a death-white woman you can help,
Let alone sister, let alone a Mildred,
You left her—or if I, her cousin, friend
This morning, playfellow but yesterday,
Who've said, or thought at least a thousand
times,

"I'd serve you if I could," should now face
round

And say, "Ah, that's to only signify

"I'd serve you while you're fit to serve
yourself—

"So long as fifty eyes await the turn

"Of yours to forestall its yet half-formed
wish,

"I'll proffer my assistance you'll not need—

"When every tongue is praising you, I'll join

"The praisers' chorus—when you're hemmed
about

"With lives between you and detraction—
lives

"To be laid down if a rude voice, rash eye,

"Rough hand should violate the sacred ring

"Their worship throws about you,—then
indeed,

"Who'll stand up for you stout as I?"
If so

We said and so we did,—not Mildred there

Would be unworthy to behold us both,

But we should be unworthy, both of us,

To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog,

Which, if that sword were broken in your
face

Before a crowd, that badge torn off your
breast,

And you cast out with hootings and contempt,

—Would push his way thro' all the hooters,
gain

Your side, go off with you and all your
shame

To the next ditch you chose to die in!

Austin,

Do you love me? Here's Austin, Mildred,
—here's

Your brother says he does not believe half—
No, nor half that—of all he heard! He says,
Look up and take his hand!

Aus. Look up and take

My hand, dear Mildred!

Mil. I—I was so young!

Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had

No mother—God forgot me—so I fell!

Guen. Mildred!

Mil. Require no rurther! Did I

dream

That I could palliate what is done? All's
true.

Now, punish me! A woman takes my hand!

Let go my hand! You do not know, I see—

I thought that Thorold told you.

Guen.

What is this?

Where start you to?

Mil.

Oh Austin, loosen me!

You heard the whole of it—your eyes were
worse,

In their surprise, than Thorold's! Oh, unless

You stay to execute his sentence, loose

My hand! Has Thorold gone, and are you
here?

Guen. Here, Mildred, we two friends
 of yours will wait
 Your bidding ; be you silent, sleep or muse !
 Only, when you shall want your bidding done,
 How can we do it if we are not by ?
 Here's Austin waiting patiently your will !
 One spirit to command, and one to love
 And to believe in it and do its best,
 Poor as that is, to help it—why, the world
 Has been won many a time, its length and
 breadth,
 By just such a beginning !

Mil. I believe
 If once I threw my arms about your neck
 And sunk my head upon your breast, that I
 Should weep again !

Guen. Let go her hand now, Austin.
 Wait for me.—Pace the gallery and think
 On the world's seemings and realities
 Until I call you. [AUSTIN goes.

Mil. No—I cannot weep !
 No more tears from this brain—no sleep—
 no tears !

O Guendolen, I love you !

Guen. Yes : and “love”
 Is a short word that says so very much !
 It says that you confide in me.

Mil. Confide !

Guen. Your lover's name, then ! I've so
 much to learn,
 Ere I can work in your behalf !

Mil.

My friend,

You know I cannot tell his name.

Guen.

At least

He is your lover? and you love him too?

Mil. Ah, do you ask me that?—but I am
fallen

So low!

Guen. You love him still, then?*Mil.*

My sole prop

Against the guilt that crushes me! I say,

Each night ere I lie down, "I was so
young—

"I had no mother—and I loved him so!"

And then God seems indulgent, and I dare

Trust Him my soul in sleep.

Guen.

How could you let us

E'en talk to you about Lord Mertoun then?

Mil. There is a cloud around me.*Guen.*

But you said

You would receive his suit in spite of this?

Mil. I say there is a cloud . . .*Guen.*

No cloud to me!

Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same!

Mil. What maddest fancy . . .*Guen.* [*Calling aloud.*]

Austin!

(Spare your pains—

When I have got a truth, that truth I keep)—

Mil. By all you love, sweet Guendolen,
forbear!

Have I confided in you . . .

Guen.

Just for this!

Austin!—Oh, not to guess it at the first!
 But I *did* guess it—that is, I divined—
 Felt by an instinct how it was—why else
 Should I pronounce you free from all that
 heap

Of sins which had been irredeemable?
 I felt they were not yours—what other way
 Than this, not yours? The secret's wholly
 mine!

Mil. If you would see me die before his
 face . . .

Guen. I'd hold my peace! And if the
 Earl returns

To-night?

Mil. Ah, Heaven, he's lost!

Guen. I thought so! Austin!

Enter AUSTIN.

Oh, where have you been hiding?

Aus. Thorold's gone,
 I know not how, across the meadowland.
 I watched him till I lost him in the skirts
 Of the beech-wood.

Guen. Gone? All thwarts us!

Mil. Thorold too?

Guen. I have thought. First lead this
 Mildred to her room.

Go on the other side: and then we'll seek
 Your brother; and I'll tell you, by the way,
 The greatest comfort in the world. You said
 There was a clew to all. Remember, sweet,
 He said there was a clew! I hold it. Come!

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The end of the Yew-tree Avenue under MILDRED'S window. A light seen through a central red pane.*

Enter TRESHAM through the trees.

Again here ! But I cannot lose myself.
The heath—the orchard—I have traversed
glades
And dells and bosky paths which used to
lead
Into green wild-wood depths, bewildering
My boy's adventurous step ; and now they
tend
Hither or soon or late ; the blackest shade
Breaks up, the thronged trunks of the trees
ope wide,
And the dim turret I have fled from fronts
Again my step ; the very river put
Its arm about me and conducted me
To this detested spot. Why then, I'll shun
Their will no longer—do your will with me !
Oh, bitter ! To have reared a towering
scheme
Of happiness, and to behold it razed,
Were nothing : all men hope, and see their
hopes

Frustrate, and grieve awhile, and hope anew :
But I . . . to hope that from a line like ours
No horrid prodigy like this would spring,
Were just as though I hoped that from
these old

Confederates against the sovereign day,
Children of older and yet older sires
(Whose living coral berries dropped, as now
On me, on many a baron's surcoat once,
On many a beauty's wimple) would proceed
No poison-tree, to thrust, from Hell its
root,

Hither and thither its strange snaky arms.
Why came I here? What must I do?—
[*A bell strikes.*]—A bell?

Midnight! and 'tis at midnight . . . Ah, I
catch

—Woods, river, plains, I catch your
meaning now

And I obey you! Hist! This tree will
serve!

[*He retires behind one of the trees. After a
pause, enter MERTOUN cloaked as before.*

Mer. Not time! Beat out thy last
voluptuous beat

Of hope and fear, my heart! I thought
the clock

In the chapel struck as I was pushing thro'
The ferns. And so I shall no more see rise
My love-star! Oh, no matter for the past!
So much the more delicious task to see

Mildred revive: to pluck out, thorn by
thorn,

All traces of the rough forbidden path
My rash love lured her to! Each day
must see

Some fear of hers effaced, some hope
renewed!

Then there will be surprises, unforeseen
Delights in store. I'll not regret the past!

*[The light is placed above in the purple
pane.]*

And see, my signal rises! Mildred's star!

I never saw it lovelier than now

It rises for the last time! If it sets,

'Tis that the re-assuring sun may dawn!

*[As he prepares to ascend the last tree of
the avenue, TRESHAM arrests his arm.]*

Unhand me—peasant, by your grasp! Here's
gold.

'Twas a mad freak of mine. I said I'd pluck
A branch from the white-blossomed shrub
beneath

The casement there! Take this, and hold
your peace.

Tresh. Into the moonlight yonder, come
with me!

—Out of the shadow!

Mer. I am armed, fool!

Tresh. Yes,

Or no?—You'll come into the light, or no?

My hand is on your throat—refuse!—

Mer.

That voice !

Where have I heard . . . no—that was
mild and slow.

I'll come with you !

[*They advance.*]

Tresh.

You're armed—that's well.

Your name—who are you ?

Mer.

(Tresham !—she is lost !)

Tresh. Oh, silent ? Do you know, you
bear yourself

Exactly as, in curious dreams I've had
How felons, this wild earth is full of, look
When they're detected, still your kind has
looked !

The bravo holds an assured countenance,
The thief is voluble and plausible,
But silently the slave of lust has crouched
When I have fancied it before a man !
Your name ?

Mer.

I do conjure Lord Tresham—ay,
Kissing his foot, if so I might prevail—
That he for his own sake forbear to ask
My name ! As Heaven's above, his future
weal

Or woe depends upon my silence ! Vain !
I read your white inexorable face !

Know me, Lord Tresham ! [*He throws off
his disguises.*]

Tresh.

Mertoun !

[*After a pause.*]

Draw now !

Mer.

Hear me

But speak first !

Tresh. Not one least word on your
life!

Be sure that I will strangle in your throat
The least word that informs me how you
live

And yet seem what you seem! No doubt
'twas you

Taught Mildred still to keep that face and
sin!

We should join hands in frantic sympathy
If you once taught me the unteachable,
Explained how you can live so, and so lie!
With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
The old belief—a life like yours is still
Impossible! Now draw!

Mer. Not for my sake,
Do I entreat a hearing—for your sake,
And most, for her sake!

Tresh. Ha, ha, what should I
Know of your ways? A miscreant like
yourself,

How must one rouse his ire?—A blow?—
that's pride

No doubt, to him! one spurns him, does
one not?

Or sets the foot upon his mouth—or spits
Into his face! Come—which, or all of
these?

Mer. 'Twixt him, and me, and Mildred,
Heaven be judge!
Can I avoid this? Have your will, my Lord!

[*He draws, and, after a few passes, falls.*

Tresh. You are not hurt?

Mer. You'll hear me now !

Tresh. But rise !

Mer. Ah, Tresham, say I not "you'll hear me now !"

And what procures a man the right to speak
In his defence before his fellow-man,
But—I suppose—the thought that presently
He may have leave to speak before his God
His whole defence ?

Tresh. Not hurt ? It cannot be !
You made no effort to resist me. Where
Did my sword reach you ? Why not have
returned

My thrusts ? Hurt where ?

Mer. My lord—

Tresh. How young he is !

Mer. Lord Tresham, I am very young,
and yet

I have entangled other lives with mine.
Do let me speak—and do believe my speech,
That when I die before you presently,—

Tresh. Can you stay here till I return
with help ?

Mer. Oh, stay by me ! When I was
less than boy

I did you grievous wrong, and knew it
not—

Upon my honour, knew it not ! Once known,
I could not find what seemed a better way

To right you than I took : my life—you feel
 How less than nothing had been giving you
 The life you've taken? But I thought my
 way

The better—only for your sake and hers.
 And as you have decided otherwise,
 Would I had an infinity of lives
 To offer you! — now say—instruct me —
 think!

Can you from out the minutes I have left
 Eke out my reparation? Oh—think—think!
 For I must wring a partial—dare I say,
 Forgiveness from you, ere I die?

Tresh.

I do

Forgive you.

Mer.

Wait and ponder that great
 word!

Because, if you forgive me, I shall hope
 To speak to you of—Mildred!

Tresh.

Mertoun,—haste

And anger have undone us. 'Tis not you
 Should tell me for a novelty you're young—
 Thoughtless—unable to recall the past!
 Be but your pardon ample as my own!

Mer. Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke
 and a drop

Of blood or two, should bring all this about!
 Why, 'twas my very fear of you—my love
 Of you—(what passion's like a boy's for one
 Like you?)—that ruined me! I dreamed of
 you—

You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
 The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
 To knit myself to you—but I was young,
 And your surpassing reputation kept me
 So far aloof—oh, wherefore all that love?
 With less of love, my glorious yesterday
 Of praise and gentle words and kindest
 looks,

Had taken place perchance six months ago!
 Even now—how happy we had been! And
 yet

I know the thought of this escaped you,
 Tresham!

Let me look up into your face—I feel
 'Tis changed above me—yet my eyes are
 glazed.

Where? where?

*[As he endeavours to raise himself, his eye
 catches the lamp.]*

Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do?
 Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
 That's bleeding fast away!—I'll live—must
 live,

There! if you'll only turn me I shall live
 And save her! Tresham—oh, had you but
 heard!

Had you but heard! What right have you
 to set

The thoughtless foot upon her life and mine,
 And then say, as we perish, "Had I
 thought,

“All had gone otherwise.” We’ve sinned
and die :

Never you sin, Lord Tresham!—for you’ll
die,

And God will judge you.

Tresh. Yes, be satisfied—

That process is begun.

Mer. And she sits there

Waiting for me. Now, say you this to her—

You—not another—say, I saw him die

As he breathed this—“I love her”—(you
don’t know

What those three small words mean) say,
loving her

Lowers me down the bloody slope to death

With memories . . . I speak to her—not
you,

Who had no pity—will have no remorse,

Perchance intend her . . . Die along with
me,

Dear Mildred!—’tis so easy—and you’ll ’scape

So much unkindness ! Can I lie at rest,

Wth rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds

Done to you—heartless men to have my
heart,

And I tied down with grave-clothes and the
worm,

Aware, perhaps, of every blow—Oh God!—

Upon those lips—yet of no power to tear

The felon stripe by stripe? Die, Mildred !

Leave

Their honourable world to them—for God
We're good enough, tho' the world casts us
out!

[*A whistle is heard.*]

Tresh. Ho, Gerard!

*Enter GERARD, AUSTIN, and GUENDOLEN,
with lights.*

No one speak! you see what's done!
I cannot bear another voice!

Mer. There's light—
Light all about me and I move to it.
Tresham, did I not tell you—did you not
Just promise to deliver words of mine
To Mildred?

Tresh. I will bear those words to her.

Mer. Now?

Tresh. Now! Lift you the body, Gerard,
and leave me
The head.

[*As they have half raised MERTOUN, he
turns suddenly.*]

Mer. I knew they turned me—turn me
not from her!

There! stay you! there! [*Dies.*]

Guen. [*After a pause.*] Austin, remain you
here

With Thorold until Gerard comes with help—
Then lead him to his chamber. I must go
To Mildred.

Tresh. Guendolen, I hear each word

You utter—did you hear him bid me give
His message? Did you hear my promise? I,
And only I, see Mildred!

Guen. She will die.

Tresh. Oh no, she will not die! I dare
not hope

She'll die. What ground have you to think
she'll die?

Why, Austin's with you!

Aus. Had we but arrived

Before you fought!

Tresh. There was no fight at all!

He let me slaughter him—the boy!—I'll
trust

The body there to you and Gerard—thus!

Now bear him on before me.

Aus. Whither bear him?

Tresh. Oh, to my chamber. When we
meet there next,

We shall be friends.

[*They bear out the body of MERTOUN.*

Will she die, Guendolen?

Guen. Where are you taking me?

Tresh. He fell just here!

Now answer me. Shall you in your whole
life

—You who have nought to do with
Mertoun's fate,

Now you have seen his breast upon the turf,
Shall you e'er walk this way if you can help?

When you and Austin wander arm in arm

Thro' our ancestral grounds, will not a
shade

Be ever on the meadow and the waste—
Another kind of shade than when the night
Shuts the woodside with all its whispers
up!

But will you ever so forget his breast
As willingly to cross this bloody turf
Under the black yew avenue? That's well!
You turn your head! and *I* then?—

Guen. What is done
Is done! My care is for the living.
Thorold,

Bear up against this burthen—more remains
To set the neck to!

Tresh. Dear and ancient trees
My fathers planted, and I loved so well!
What have I done that, like some fabled
crime

Of yore, lets loose a fury leading thus
Her miserable dance amidst you all?
Oh, never more for me shall winds intone
With all your tops a vast antiphony,
Demanding and responding in God's praise!
Hers ye are now — not mine! Farewell
—Farewell!

SCENE II.—MILDRED'S *Chamber*. MILDRED
alone.

He comes not ! I have heard of those who
seemed

Resourceless in prosperity,—you thought
Sorrow might slay them when she listed—
yet

Did they so gather up their diffused strength
At her first menace, but they bade her strike,
And stood and laughed her subtlest skill to
scorn.

Oh, 'tis not so with me ! the first woe fell,
And the rest fall upon it, not on me :
Else should I bear that Henry comes not?—
fails

Just this first night out of so many nights?
Loving is done with ! Were he sitting
now,

As so few hours since, on that seat, we'd
love

No more—contrive no thousand happy ways
To hide love from the loveless, any more !

I think I might have urged some little point
In my defence, to Thorold ; he was breath-
less

For the least hint of a defence ; but no !
The first shame over, all that would might
fall.

No Henry ! Yet I merely sit and think

The morn's deed o'er and o'er. I must have
crept

Out of myself. A Mildred that has lost
Her lover—oh, I dare not look upon
Such woe! I crouch away from it! 'Tis she,
Mildred, will break her heart, not I! The
world

Forsakes me—only Henry's left me—left?
When I have lost him, for he does not
come,

And I sit stupidly. . . . Oh Heaven,
break up

This worse than anguish, this mad apathy,
By any means or any messenger!

Tresh. [*Without.*] Mildred!

Mil. Come in! Heaven hears me!

[*TRESHAM enters.*] You? alone?

Oh, no more cursing!

Tresh. Mildred, I must sit.

There—you sit!

Mil. Say it, Thorold—do not look
The curse—deliver all you come to say!
What must become of me? Oh speak that
thought

Which makes your brow and cheek so pale!

Tresh. My thought?

Mil. All of it!

Tresh. How we waded—years ago—
After those water-lilies, till the plash,
I know not how, surprised us; and you
dared

Neither advance nor turn back, so we stood
Laughing and crying until Gerard came—
Once safe upon the turf, the loudest, too,
For once more reaching the relinquished
prize!

How idle thoughts are—some men's—dying
men's!

Mildred,—

Mil. You call me kindlier by my name
Than even yesterday—what is in that?

Tresh. It weighs so much upon my mind
that I

This morning took an office not my own!
I might . . . of course, I must be glad or
grieved,

Content or not, at every little thing
That touches you—I may with a wrung
heart

Even reprove you, Mildred; I did more—
Will you forgive me?

Mil. Thorold? do you mock? . . .
Or no . . . and yet you bid me . . . say that
word!

Tresh. Forgive me, Mildred!—are you
silent, sweet?

Mil. [*Starting up.*] Why does not Henry
Mertoun come to-night?

Are *you*, too, silent?

[*Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing
to his scabbard, which is empty.*

Ah, this speaks for you!

You've murdered Henry Mertoun! now
proceed!

What is it I must pardon? This and all?

Well, I do pardon you—I think I do.

Thorold, how very wretched you must be!

Tresh. He bade me tell you. . . .

Mil. What I do forbid

Your utterance of! so much that you may
tell

And will not—how you murdered him . . .
but, no!

You'll tell me that he loved me, never more
Than bleeding out his life there—must I say
“Indeed” to that? Enough! I pardon you!

Tresh. You cannot, Mildred! for the harsh
words, yes:

Of this last deed Another's Judge—whose
doom

I wait in doubt, despondency, and fear.

Mil. Oh true! there's nought for me to
pardon! True!

You loosed my soul of all its cares at once—
Death makes me sure of him for ever! *You*
Tell me his last words? *He* shall tell me
them,

And take my answer—not in words, but
reading

Himself the heart I had to read him late,
Which death . . .

Tresh. Death? you are dying too?
Well said

Of Guendolen! I dared not hope you'd
die—

But she was sure of it.

Mil. Tell Guendolen I loved
her, and tell Austin . . .

Tresh. . . . Him you loved—
And me?

Mil. Ah, Thorold! was't not rashly
done

To quench that blood, on fire with youth
and hope

And love of me, whom you loved too, and
yet

Suffered to sit here waiting his approach
While you were slaying him? Oh, doubt-
lessly

You let him speak his poor confused boy's-
speech

—Do his poor utmost to disarm your wrath
And respite me!—you let him try to give
The story of our loves, and ignorance,
And the brief madness, and the long despair—
You let him plead all this, because your code
Of honour bids you hear before you strike :
But at the end, as he looked up for life
Into your eyes—you struck him down !

Tresh. No ! no !
Had I but heard him—had I let him speak
Half the truth—less—had I looked long on
him,

I had desisted ! Why, as he lay there,

The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all
The story ere he told it ! I saw thro'
The troubled surface of his crime and yours
A depth of purity immovable !
Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest,
Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath !
I would not glance—my punishment's at hand.
There, Mildred, is the truth ! and you—
say on—

You curse me ?

Mil. As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from
stain,

But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven,—I—forgive not,
But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of
souls ! *[Falls on his neck.*

There ! do not think too much upon the past !
The cloud that's broke was all the same a
cloud

While it stood up between my friend and
you !

You hurt him 'neath its shadow—but is that
So past retrieve ? I have his heart, you
know—

I may dispose of it—I give it you !
It loves you as mine loves ! Confirm me,
Henry ! *[Dies.*

Tresh. I wish thee joy, beloved ! I am glad
In thy full gladness !

Guen. [*Without.*] Mildred ! Tresham !
 [*Entering with AUSTIN.*] Thorold, I could
 desist no longer. Ah, she swoons !

That's well—

Tresh. Oh ! better far than that !

Guen. She's dead !

Let me unlock her arms !

Tresh. She threw them thus
 About my neck, and blessed me, and then died.
 —You'll let them stay now, Guendolen !

Aus. Leave her
 And look to him ! What ails you, Thorold ?

Guen. White
 As she—and whiter ! Austin—quick—this
 side !

Aus. A froth is oozing thro' his clenched
 teeth—
 Both lips, where they're not bitten thro',
 are black !

Speak, dearest Thorold !

Tresh. Something does weigh down
 My neck beside her weight: thanks: I should
 fall

But for you, Austin, I believe !—there, there—
 'Twill pass away soon !—ah,—I had for-
 gotten—

I am dying.

Guen. Thorold—Thorold—why was this ?

Tresh. I said, just as I drank the poison
 off,
 The earth would be no longer earth to me,

The life out of all life was gone from me!
 There are blind ways provided, the foredone
 Heart-weary player in this pageant-world
 Drops out by, letting the main masque defile
 By the conspicuous portal:—I am through—
 Just through:—

Guen. Don't leave him, Austin! death
 is close.

Tresh. Already Mildred's face is peace-
 fuller!

I see you, Austin—feel you—here's my hand,
 Put yours in it—You, Guendolen, yours too!
 You're Lord and Lady now — You're
 Treshams—Name

And fame are yours — You hold our
 'Scutcheon up.

Austin, no Blot on it! You see how blood
 Must wash one blot away: the first blot
 came

And the first blood came. To the vain
 world's eye

All's gules again—no care to the vain world,
 From whence the red was drawn!

Aus. No blot shall come!

Tresh. I said that—yet it did come.
 Should it come,

Vengeance is God's not man's. Remember
 me! [Dies.]

Guen. [Letting fall the pulseless arm.]
 Ah, Thorold, we can but—remember
 you!

IN A GONDOLA.

He sings.

I SEND my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing !
For the stars help me, and the sea bears
part ;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its
dwelling-place.

She speaks.

Say after me, and try to say
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord,
In your own voice, in your own way :
" This woman's heart, and soul, and brain
" Are mine as much as this gold chain
" She bids me wear ; which " (say again)
" I choose to make by cherishing
" A precious thing, or choose to fling
" Over the boat-side, ring by ring."
And yet once more say . . . no word more !
Since words are only words. Give o'er !
Unless you call me, all the same,
Familiarly by my pet-name

Which, if the Three should hear you call,
And me reply to, would proclaim
At once our secret to them all :
Ask of me, too, command me, blame—
Do break down the partition-wall
'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
Curtained in dusk and splendid folds.
What's left but—all of me to take ?
I am the Three's ; prevent them, slake
Your thirst ! 'Tis said, the Arab sage
In practising with gems can loose
Their subtle spirit in his cruce
And leave but ashes : so, sweet mage,
Leave them my ashes when thy use
Sucks out my soul, thy heritage !

He sings.

I.

Past we glide, and past, and past !
What's that poor Agnese doing
Where they make the shutters fast ?
Gray Zanobi's just a-wooning
To his couch the purchased bride :
Past we glide !

II.

Past we glide, and past, and past !
Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast ?
Guests by hundreds—not one caring

If the dear host's neck were wried :
Past we glide !

She sings.

I.

The Moth's kiss, first !
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up ; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide open burst.

II.

The Bee's kiss, now !
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so all is rendered up,
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

He sings.

I

What are we two ?
I am a Jew,
And carry thee, farther than friends can
pursue.

To a feast of our tribe,
Where they need thee to bribe
The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe
Thy . . . Shatter the vision for ever ! And
now,
As of old, I am I, Thou art Thou !

II.

Say again, what we are ?
The sprite of a star,
I lure thee above where the Destinies bar
My plumes their full play
Till a ruddier ray
Than my pale one announce there is wither-
ing away
Some . . . Shatter the vision for ever ! And
now,
As of old, I am I, Thou art Thou !

He muses.

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest ?
The land's lap or the water's breast ?
To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
Or swim in lucid shallows, just
Eluding water-lily leaves,
An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
To lock you, whom release he must ;
Which life were best on Summer eves ?

He speaks, musing.

Lie back ; could thought of mine improve
you ?

From this shoulder let there spring
A wing ; from this, another wing ;
Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you !
Snow-white must they spring, to blend
With your flesh, but I intend
They shall deepen to the end,
Broader, into burning gold,
Till both wings crescent-wise enfold
Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
As if a million sword-blades hurled
Defiance from you to the world !
Rescue me thou, the only real !
And scare away this mad Ideal
That came, nor notions to depart !
Thanks ! Now, stay ever as thou art !

Still he muses.

I.

What if the Three should catch at last
Thy serenader ? While there's cast
Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
Gian pinions me, Himself has past
His stylet thro' my back ; I reel ;
And . . . is it Thou I feel ?

II.

They trail me, these three godless knaves,
Past every church that sains and saves,
Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
By Lido's wet accursed graves,
They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And . . . on Thy breast I sink !

She replies, musing.

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do : thus : were Death so unlike Sleep,
Caught this way ? Death's to fear from
 flame, or steel,
Or poison doubtless ; but from water—feel !

Go find the bottom ! Would you stay me ?
 There !

Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away : since you have praised my
 hair,
'Tis proper to be choice in what I wear.

He speaks.

Row home ? must we row home ? Too surely
Know I where its front's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled ;
Window just with window mating,
Door on door exactly waiting,
All's the set face of a child :

But behind it, where's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead!
First, out a cloud of curtain blew.
Then, a sweet cry, and last, came you—
To catch your loory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.
I scarce could breathe to see you reach
So far back o'er the balcony
(To catch him ere he climbed too high
Above you in the Smyrna peach)
That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
This coiled hair on your head, unrolled,
Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
The Roman girls were wont, of old,
When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
Dear loory, may his beak retain
Ever its delicate rose stain
As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
Had marked their thief to know again!
Stay longer yet, for others' sake
Than mine! what should your chamber do?
—With all its rarities that ache

In silence while day lasts, but wake
At night-time and their life renew,
Suspended just to pleasure you
—That brought against their will together
These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
Around them such a magic tether
That they look dumb : your harp, believe,
With all the sensitive tight strings
That dare not speak, now to itself
Breathes slumbrously as if some elf
Went in and out the chords, his wings
Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
As an angel may, between the maze
Of midnight palace-pillars, on
And on, to sow God's plagues have gone
Through guilty glorious Babylon.
And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell,
As the dry limpet for the lymph
Come with a tune he knows so well.
And how your statues' hearts must swell !
And how your pictures must descend
To see each other, friend with friend !
Oh, could you take them by surprise,
You'd find Schidone's eager Duke
Doing the quaintest courtesies
To that prim Saint by Haste-thee-Luke :
And, deeper into her rock den,
Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen
You'd find retreated from the ken
Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—

As if the Tizian thinks of her,
And is not, rather, gravely bent
On seeing for himself what toys
Are these, his progeny invent,
What litter now the board employs
Whereon he signed a document
That got him murdered ! Each enjoys
Its night so well, you cannot break
The sport up, so, indeed must make
More stay with me, for others' sake

She speaks.

I.

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
Is used to tie the jasmine back
That overflows my room with sweets,
Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets
My Zanze : if the ribbon's black,
The Three are watching ; keep away.

II.

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreath
A mesh of water-weeds about
Its prow, as if he unaware
Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair ;
That I may throw a paper out
As you and he go underneath.

There's Zanze's vigilant taper ; safe are we !
Only one minute more to-night with me ?
Resume your past self of a month ago !
Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
The lady with the colder breast than snow :
Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my
hand
More than I touch yours when I step to land,
And say, All thanks, Siora !—

Heart to heart,
And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we
part,
Clasp me, and make me thine, as mine
thou art!

He is surprised, and stabbed.

It was ordained to be so, Sweet,—and best
Comes now, beneath thine eyes, and on thy
breast.

Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards!
Care

Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not
scorn

To death, because they never lived : but I
Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more
kiss)—can die !

CRISTINA.

I.

SHE should never have looked at me,
If she meant I should not love her !
There are plenty . . . men, you call such,
I suppose . . . she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them .
But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them.

II.

What? To fix me thus meant nothing ?
But I can't tell . . . there's my weak-
ness . . .
What her look said !—no vile cant, sure,
About “need to strew the bleakness
“Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed,
“That the Sea feels”—no “strange
yearning
“That such souls have, most to lavish
“Where there's chance of least returning.”

III.

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows !
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments

Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

IV.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby sworn ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstified,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled.

V.

Doubt you it, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence, fleets again for ages :
While the true end, sole and single
It stops here for is, this love-way,
With some other soul to mingle?

VI.

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it ;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses, if you choose it,

But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt, as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together?

VII.

Oh, observe! Of course, next moment,
The world's honours, in derision,
Trampled out the light for ever:
Never fear but there's provision
Of the Devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture!
—Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture.

VIII.

Such am I: the secret's mine now!
She has lost me—I have gained her
Her soul's mine: and, thus, grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder,
Life will just hold out the proving
Both our powers, alone and blended—
And then, come the next life quickly!
This world's use will have been ended.

PICTOR IGNOTUS.

[FLORENCE, 15—.]

I COULD have painted pictures like that
youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up!
No bar
Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while
it soothes!—
Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh
have shrunk
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to Heaven, or, straight like
thunder, sunk
To the centre, of an instant; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The license and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to Truth made visible in Man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvass could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a
tongue;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,

Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her
brood
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its
place,
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle
braved,—
O Human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
What did ye give me that I have not saved?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!)
Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms
swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South or
North,
Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the
freight,
Through old streets named afresh from its
event,
Till it reached home, where learned Age
should greet
My face, and Youth, the star not yet
distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should
end,
And then not go to Heaven, but linger
here,

Here on my earth, earth's every man my
friend,—

The thought grew frightful, 'twas so
'wildly dear!

But a voice changed it! Glimpses of such
sights

Have scared me, like the revels thro' a
door

Of some strange House of Idols at its rites;
This world seemed not the world it was
before!

Mixed with my loving trusting ones there
trooped

. . . Who summoned those cold faces that
begun

To press on me and judge me? 'Tho' I
stooped

Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . .
enough!

These buy and sell our pictures, take and
give,

Count them for garniture and household stuff,
And where they live our pictures needs
must live,

And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of,—“This I love, or this I
hate,

“This likes me more, and this affects me
less!”

Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and
Saint,
With the same cold, calm, beautiful regard,
At least no merchant traffics in my heart ;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures
stand apart ;
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-
smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So die, my pictures ; surely, gently die !
Oh, youth, men praise so,—holds their
praise its worth ?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden
cry ?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks
of earth ?

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY.

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE.

(*In the original*) ROSA MUNDI ; SEU, FULCITE
 ME FLORIBUS. A CONCEIT OF MASTER
 GYSBRECHT, CANON-REGULAR OF SAINT
 JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR, YPRES CITY. CAN-
 TUQUE, *Virgilius*. AND HATH OFTEN
 BEEN SUNG AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTI-
 VALS. GAVISUS ERAM, *Jessides*.

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the
 burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, at
 Paris, A.D. 1314 ; as distorted by the re-
 fraction from Flemish brain to brain, during
 the course of a couple of centuries.—R. B.)

I.

PREADMONISHETH THE ABBOT DEODAE1

THE Lord, we look to once for all,
 Is the Lord we should look at, all at once :
 He knows not to vary, saith St. Paul,
 Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.
 See Him no other than as he is ;
 Give both the Infinites their due—
 Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
 As infinite a justice too.
[*Organ : plagal cadence.*
 As infinite a justice too.

II.

ONE SINGETH.

John, Master of the Temple of God,
Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin—
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.
 *[And wanteth there grace of lute or
 clavicithern, ye shall say to confirm
 him who singeth—*
We bring John now to be burned alive.

III.

In the midst is a goodly gallows built ;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck ;
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city
muck ;
Inside they pile log upon log, good store ;
Faggots not few, blocks great and small,
Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,—
For they mean he should roast in the sight
of all.

CHORUS.

We mean he should roast in the sight
of all.

IV.

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith ;
 Billets that blaze substantial and slow ;
 Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith ;
 Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white
 glow :
 Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,
 Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
 Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
 Sing " Laudes " and bid clap-to the torch.

CHORUS.

Laus Deo—who bids clap-to the torch.

V.

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
 Is burning alive in Paris square !
 How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged ?
 Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there ?
 Or heave his chest, while a band goes round ?
 Or threat with his fist, since his arms are
 spliced ?
 Or kick with his feet, now his legs are
 bound ?
 —Thinks John—I will call upon Jesus
 Christ. [*Here one crosseth himself.*]

VI.

Jesus Christ—John had bought and sold,
 Jesus Christ—John had eaten and drunk ;

To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.

(*Salva reverentia.*)

Now it was, "Saviour, bountiful lamb,
I have roasted thee Turks, though men
roast me.

See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!
Art thou a Saviour? Save thou me!"

CHORUS.

'Tis John the mocker cries, Save thou me!

VII.

Who maketh God's menace an idle word?

—Saith, it no more means what it pro-
claims,

Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird?—

For she too prattles of ugly names.

—Saith, he knoweth but one thing,—what
he knows;

That God is good and the rest is breath;

Why else is the same styled, Sharon's rose?

Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS.

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

VIII.

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!

Some, honied of taste like your leman's
tongue:

Some, bitter—for why? (roast gaily on!)
 Their tree struck root in devil's dung!
 When Paul once reasoned of righteousness
 And of temperance and of judgment to
 come,
 Good Felix trembled, he could no less—
 John, snickering, crook'd his wicked
 thumb?

CHORUS.

What cometh to John of the wicked
 thumb?

IX.

Ha ha, John plucks now at his rose
 To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
 Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays uncloset;
 Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
 And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
 And a gust of sulphur is all its smell
 And lo, he is horribly in the toils
 Of a coal-black giant flower of Hell!

CHORUS.

What maketh Heaven, that maketh Hell.

X.

So, as John called now, through the fire
 amain,
 On the Name, he had cursed with, all his
 life—

To the Person, he bought and sold again—
 For the Face, with his daily buffets rife—
 Feature by feature It took its place!

And his voice like a mad dog's choking
 bark

At the steady Whole of the Judge's Face—
 Died. Forth John's soul flared into the
 dark.

SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark.

AN EPISTLE.

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERI-
 ENCE OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
 The not-incurious in God's handiwork
 (This man's-flesh He hath admirably made,
 Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
 To coop up and keep down on earth a space
 That puff of vapour from His mouth, man's
 soul)

—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
 Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
 Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
 Befall the flesh through too much stress and
 strain,

Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
And aptest in contrivance, under God,
To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame
with peace)
Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer
still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than
drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho,
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward—
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted
ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten
me,
And once a town declared me for a spy,
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,

This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laugh-
est here !

'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say,
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of : there's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of
tombs,

Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-gray back ;
Take five and drop them . . . but who
knows his mind,

The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to ?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-
grained,

Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at
Zoar—

But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price—
Suppose I write what harms not, though he
steal?

I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else
The Man had something in the look of him—
His case has struck me far more than 'tis
worth.

So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from
me)

I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the
truth?

The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all.

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days,
When by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to
know,

The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—

But, flinging, so to speak, life's gates too
wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered pleased to
write

Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent

Attaineth to erase the fancy-scrawls
Which the returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or
none.

And first—the man's own firm conviction
rests

That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
—That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :
—'Sayeth, the same bade " Rise," and he did
rise.

" Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment !—not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and
all !

For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,

As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to shew.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days'
sleep!

Whence has the man the balm that brightens
all?

This grown man eyes the world now like a
child.

Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the
case,—

He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no
fool.

And that's a sample how his years must go.
Look if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure, can he use the same
With straightened habits and with tastes
starved small,

And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
—That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his
hand,

And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—
Warily parsimonious, when's no need,

Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times ?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one.
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here—we'll call the treasure knowledge,
say—

Increased beyond the fleshly faculty—
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing
Heaven.

The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
'Tis one ! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact—he will gaze
rapt

With stupor at its very littleness—
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results ;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes !
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,—why,
look

For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of his daily craft—

While a word, gesture, glance, from that
same child,

At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will start him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like ! demand
The reason why—" 'tis but a word," object—
" A gesture "—he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us, dost thou mind, when being
young

We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of
his,

Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads from under which
ye both

Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a
match

Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !
He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
(It is the life to lead perforce)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
The spiritual life around the earthly life !
The law of that is known to him as this—
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay
here.

So is the man perplexed with impulses

Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is Right and Wrong
across—

And not along—this black thread through
the blaze—

“It should be” balked by “here it cannot be.”
And oft the man’s soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him “Rise” and he did
rise.

Something—a word, a tick of the blood
within

Admonishes—then back he sinks at once
To ashes, that was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread—
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God’s secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the Heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.

’Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which will restore his
being

To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth :
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God
please.

He even seeketh not to please God more

(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God
please.

Hence I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be—
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do.
How can he give his neighbour the real
ground,

His own conviction? ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why still the old
"Be it as God please" reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should—
"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness

Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise he loves both old and young,
Able and weak—affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognises tools
In a master's workshop, loving what they
make.

Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed.
As when in certain travels I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,

And happed to hear the land's practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my
peace!

Thou wilt object—why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, enquiring at the
source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death which happened when the earth-
quake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
That lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people—that's
their wont—
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
How could he stop the earthquake? That's
their way!
The other imputations must be lies:
But take one—though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect to any good man's fame!
(And after all our patient Lazarus

Is stark mad—should we count on what he
says?

Perhaps not—though in writing to a leech
'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)

This man so cured regards the curer then,
As—God forgive me—who but God himself,
Creator and Sustainer of the world,

That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—'Sayeth that such an One was born and
lived,

Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his
own house,

Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I
know,

And yet was . . . what I said nor choose
repeat,

And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus

Who saith—but why all this of what he
saith?

Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?

I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth.
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest

And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus—
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek-teeth. Out there
came

A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing :
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine,
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou
think?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human
voice

Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of
mine,

But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for
thee!"

The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

RABBI BEN EZRA.

I.

GROW old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made :
Our times are in His hand
Who saith " A whole I planned,
" Youth shows but half ; trust God : see all
nor be afraid ! "

II.

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed " Which rose make ours,
" Which lily leave and then as best recall ? "
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned " Nor Jove, nor Mars ;
" Mine be some figured flame which blends,
transcends them all ! "

III.

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate : folly wide the mark !
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a
spark.

IV.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast :
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men ;
Irks care the crop-full bird ? Frets doubt the
maw-crammed beast ?

V.

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive !
A spark disturbs our clod ;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take,
I must believe.

VI.

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but
go !
Be our joys three-parts pain !
Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never
grudge the throe !

VII.

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail :
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me :
A brute I might have been, but would not
sink i' the scale.

VIII.

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want
play ?
To man, propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its
lone way ?

IX.

Yet gifts should prove their use :
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn :
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole ;
Should not the heart beat once " How good
to live and learn " ?

X.

Not once beat " Praise be Thine !
" I see the whole design, .

“ I, who saw power, see now love perfect too :

“ Perfect I call Thy plan :

“ Thanks that I was a man !

“ Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do ! ”

XI.

For pleasant is this flesh ;

Our soul, in its rose-mesh

Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest ;

Would we some prize might hold ·

To match those manifold

Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best !

XII.

Let us not always say

“ Spite of this flesh to-day

“ I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole ! ”

As the bird wings and sings,

Let us cry “ All good things

“ Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul ! ”

XIII.

Therefore I summon age

To grant youth's heritage,

Life's struggle having so far reached its
term :

Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute ; a god though
in the germ.

xiv.

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and
new :

Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to
indue.

xv.

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby ;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is
gold :

And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame :
Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know,
being old.

xvi.

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray :

A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
"Take it and try its worth : here dies another
day."

XVII.

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
"That acquiescence vain :
"The Future I may face now I have proved
the Past."

XVIII.

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day :
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's
true play.

XIX.

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found
made :
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedest age : wait death
nor be afraid !

XX.

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand
thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee
feel alone.

XXI.

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past !
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give
us peace at last !

XXII.

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me : we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that : whom shall my
soul believe ?

XXIII.

Not on the vulgar mass
Called " work," must sentence pass,

Things done, that took the eye and had the price ;

O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value
in a trice :

XXIV.

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account ;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled
the man's amount :

XXV.

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and
escaped ;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the
pitcher shaped.

XXVI.

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor ! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our
clay,—

Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
“Since life fleets, all is change; the Past
gone, seize to-day!”

XXVII.

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand
sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter
and clay endure.

XXVIII.

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain
arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently
impressed.

XXIX.

What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?

What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner
stress?

XXX.

Look not thou down but up .
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's
peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow !
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st
thou with earth's wheel?

XXXI.

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who moulded men ;
And since, not even while the whirl was
worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife,
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake
Thy thirst :

XXXII.

So, take and use Thy work :
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past
the aim !

My times be in Thy hand !
Perfect the cup as planned !
Let age approve of youth, and death complete
the same !

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS.

I.

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening
smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or
stop
As they crop—

II.

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding
far
Peace or war.

III.

Now—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,

To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)

IV.

Where the domed and daring palace shot
its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit, of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor
be prest,
Twelve abreast.

V.

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was !
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'er-
spreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—

VI.

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and
woe
Long ago ;

Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread
of shame

Struck them tame ;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

VII.

Now,—the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of
blossom winks
Through the chinks—

VIII.

Marks the basement whence a tower in
ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring all round, the chariots
traced
As they raced
And the monarch and his minions and his
dames
Viewed the games.

IX.

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured
eve
Smiles to leave

To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished
gray
Melt away—

X.

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret, whence the charioteers caught
soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks
now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

XI.

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all
the glades'
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and
then,
All the men!

XII.

When I do come, she will speak not, she
will stand,
Either hand

On my shoulder, give her eyes the first
embrace

Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and
speech

Each on each. .

XIII.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and north.

And they built their gods a brazen pillar
high

As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full
force—

Gold, or course.

XIV.

Oh, heart ! oh, blood that freezes, blood that
burns !

Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin !

Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and
the rest.

Love is best !

SONG.

I.

NAY but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

II.

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world
over;
So, why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above
her?
Above this tress, and this I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

A LOVER'S QUARREL.

I.

OH, what a dawn of day !
How the March sun feels like May !
 All is blue again
 After last night's rain,
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray.
 Only, my Love's away !
I'd as lief that the blue were gray.

II.

Runnels, which rillels swell,
Must be dancing down the dell
 With a foamy head
 On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell :
 Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

III.

Dearest, three months ago !
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
 When the wind would edge
 In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go—
 Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so !

IV.

Laughs with so little cause !
We devised games out of straws.
 We would try and trace
 One another's face
In the ash, as an artist draws ;
 Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church daws !

V.

What's in the " Times " ?—a scold
At the emperor deep and cold ;
 He has taken a bride
 To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself is bold :
 There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

VI.

Fancy the Pampas' sheen !
Miles and miles of gold and green
 Where the sun-flowers blow
 In a solid glow,
And to break now and then the screen—
 Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between !

VII.

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn

Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn !

VIII.

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
Each with arm o'er neck.
'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
Help in the ocean-space !
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

IX.

See, how she looks now, drest
In a sledging-cap and vest.
'Tis a huge fur cloak—
Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast :
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

X.

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
Or I tint your lip
With a burn't stick's tip

And you turn into such a man !

Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

XI.

Dearest, three months ago

When the mesmeriser Snow

With his hand's first sweep

Put the earth to sleep,

'Twas a time when the heart could show

All—how was earth to know,

'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro !

XII.

Dearest, three months ago

When we loved each other so,

Lived and loved the same

Till an evening came

When a shaft from the Devil's bow

Pierced to our ingle-glow,

And the friends were friend and foe !

XIII.

Not from the heart beneath—

'Twas a bubble born of breath,

Neither sneer nor vaunt,

Nor reproach nor taunt.

See a word, how it severeth !

Oh, power of life and death

In the tongue, as the Preacher saith :

XIV.

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
 Me, your own, your you,—
 Since, as Truth is true,
I was you all the happy past—
 Me do you leave aghast
With the memories we amassed?

XV.

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
 How I look to you
 For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
 Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threatens the white!

XVI.

What of a hasty word?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
 By a worm's pin-prick
 Where its roots are quick?
See the eye, by a fly's-foot blurred—
 Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

XVII.

Foul be the world or fair,
More or less, how can I care?

'Tis the world the same
For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare—
Oh, it is hard to bear !

XVIII.

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows ;
We shall have the word
In that minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows—
Heaps of the guelder-rose !
I must bear with it, I suppose.

XIX.

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum !

XX.

Then, were the world well stript
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart

In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
 Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt !

XXI.

Each in the crypt would cry
“ But one freezes here ! and why ?
 When a heart as chill
 At my own would thrill
Back to life, and its fires out-fly ?
 Heart, shall we live or die ?
The rest, . . . settle it by and by ! ”

XXII.

So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
 Just at twelve o'clock
 I shall hear her knock
In the worst of a storm's uproar—
 I shall pull her through the door—
I shall have her for evermore !

FRA LIPPO LIPPI.

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame ? you think you see a
monk !

What, it's past midnight, and you go the
rounds,

And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar.
The Carmine's my cloister : hunt it up,
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong
hole,

And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him com-
pany !

Aha, you know your betters ? Then, you'll
take

Your hand away that's fiddling on my
throat,

And please to know me likewise. Who am
I ?

Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how
d'ye call ?

Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
In the house that caps the corner. Boh !
you were best !

Remember and tell me, the day you're
hanged,

How you affected such a gullet's-gripe !

But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you.

Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the
streets

And count fair prize what comes into their
net ?

He's Judas to a tittle, that man is !

Just such a face ! why, sir, you make amends.

Lord ! I'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs
go

Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads ! more beside !)
And all's come square again. I'd like his
face—

His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave
that holds

John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("look you, now," as who
should say)

And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you ? like
enough !

I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to
haunch.

Here's spring come, and the nights one
makes up bands

To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my
mew,

A-painting for the great man, saints and
saints

And saints again. I could not paint all
night—

Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh
air.

There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs
of song,—

Flower o' the broom,

Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!

Flower o' the quince,

I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since?

Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they
went.

Scarce had they turned the corner when a
titter,

Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight—
three slim shapes—

And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir,
flesh and blood,

That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,

Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder ! down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and
so dropped,

And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by St. Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,

If I've been merry, what matter who knows ?

And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the
flesh,

You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see !
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake
your head—

Mine's shaved,—a monk, you say—the sting's
in that !

If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word naturally ; but a monk !
Come, what am I a beast for ? tell us, now !
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or
two

On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and
shucks,

Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day
My stomach being empty as your hat,

The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six
words, there,
While I stood munching my first bread that
month :
“ So, boy, you’re minded,” quoth the good
fat father
Wiping his own mouth, ’twas refection-
time,—
“ To quit this very miserable world ?
Will you renounce ” . . . The mouthful of
bread ? thought I ;
By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of
me ;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years
old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
’Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all
round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside !
“ Let’s see what the urchin’s fit for ”—that
came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do ! they tried me with their books.

Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure
waste !

Flower o' the clove,

All the Latin I construe is, " amo " I love !

But, mind you, when a boy starves in the
streets

Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will
fling

The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he
desires,

And who will curse or kick him for his
pains—

Which gentleman processional and fine,

Holding a candle to the Sacrament,

Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch

The droppings of the wax to sell again,

Or holla for the Eight and have him
whipped,—

How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which
lets drop

His bone from the heap of offal in the
street !

—The soul and sense of him grow sharp
alike,

He learns the look of things, and none the
less

For admonitions from the hunger-pinch.

I had a store of such remarks, be sure,

Which, after I found leisure, turned to use :

I drew men's faces on my copy-books,

Scrawled them within the antiphony's
marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-
notes,
Found nose and eyes and chin for A's
and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The
monks looked black.
"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out,
d'ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up
fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon they bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, their
walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and
white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then folks at
church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-
ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there

With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of
Christ

(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head
Which the intense eyes looked through, came
at eve

On tip-toe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers
The brute took growling, prayed, and then
was gone.

I painted all, then cried "'tis ask and have—
Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder
flat,

And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised
loud

Till checked, (taught what to see and not to
see,

Being simple bodies) "that's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman's like the Prior's niece who
comes

To care about his asthma: it's the life!
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and
funked—

Their betters took their turn to see and say:

The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. "How?
what's here?"

Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as
flesh.

Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no it's
not . . .

It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your
mouth)

It's : . well, what matters talking, it's the
soul!

Give us no more of body than shows soul.
Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising
God!

That sets you praising,—why not stop with
him?

Why put all thoughts of praise out of our
heads

With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.

Oh, that white smallish female with the
breasts,

She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would
say,—

Who went and danced and got men's heads
cut off—

Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does
for white

When what you put for yellow's simply
black,

And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks
nought.

Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so
pretty

You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and
blue,

Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them three-
fold?

Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents,—

That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul
you have missed,

Within yourself when you return Him thanks !
" Rub all out ! " well, well, there's my life,
in short,

And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken
bounds—

You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the
girls—

I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-
house !

Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in
front—

Those great rings serve more purposes than
just

To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse !

And yet the old schooling sticks—the old
grave eyes

Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—" It's Art's decline,
my son !

You're not of the true painters, great and
old :

Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find :

Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer.

Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the
third ! "

Flower o' the pine,

*You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll
stick to mine!*

I'm not the third, then : bless us, they must
know !

Don't you think they're the likeliest to
know,

They, with their Latin? so I swallow my
rage,

Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and
paint

To please them—sometimes do, and some-
times don't,

For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn—some warm eve finds me at my
saints—

A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(*Flower o' the peach,*

Death for us all, and his own life for each!)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs
o'er,

The world and life's too big to pass for a
dream,

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,

In pure rage! the old mill-horse, out at
grass

After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.

What would men have? Do they like
grass or no—

May they or mayn't they? all I want's the
thing

Settled for ever one way : as it is

You tell too many lies and hurt yourself.

You don't like what you only like too much,

You do like what, if given you at your
word,

You find abundantly detestable.

For me, I think I speak as I was taught—

I always see the Garden and God there

A-making man's wife — and, my lesson
learned,

The value and significance of flesh,

I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward.

You understand me : I'm a beast, I know.

But see, now—why, I see as certainly

As that the morning-star's about to shine,

What will hap some day. We've a
youngster here

Comes to our convent, studies what I do,

Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop—

His name is Guidi — he'll not mind the
monks—

They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them
talk—

He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,

I hope so—though I never live so long,

I know what's sure to follow. You be
judge !

You speak no Latin more than I, belike—

However, you're my man, you've seen the
world

—The beauty and the wonder and the
power,

The shapes of things, their colours, lights
and shades,

Changes, surprises,—and God made it all !

—For what ? do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's
line,

The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman,
child,

These are the frame to ? What's it all
about ?

To be passed o'er, despised ? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at ? oh, this last of course, you
say.

But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?

God's works—paint anyone, and count it
crime

To let a truth slip. Don't object, " His
works

Are here already—nature is complete :

Suppose you reproduce her—(which you
can't)

There's no advantage ! you must beat her,
then."

For, don't you mark, we're made so that we
love

First when we see them painted, things we
have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
And so they are better, painted—better to
us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given
for that—
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed,
now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should though ! How
much more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth !
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you ! oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves ! This world's no
blot for us,
Nor blank—it means intensely, and means
good :
To find its meaning in my meat and drink.
“ Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer,”
Strikes in the Prior ! “ when your meaning's
plain
It does not say to folks—remember matins—
Or, mind you fast next Friday.” Why, for
this
What need of art at all ? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or,
what's best,

A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a St. Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style.
“How looks my painting, now the scaffold’s
down?”

I ask a brother: “Hugely,” he returns—
“Already not one phiz of your three slaves
That turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But’s scratched and prodded to our heart’s
content,

The pious people have so eased their own
When coming to say prayers there in a rage.
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i’ the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose!” Hang
the fools!

—That is—you’ll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don’t misreport me,
now!

It’s natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me; I shall paint a piece
. . . There’s for you! Give me six months,
then go, see
Something in Sant’ Ambrogio’s . . . (bless
the nuns!

They want a cast of my office) I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to church at mid-
summer.

And then in the front, of course a saint or
two—

Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and
white

The convent's friends and gives them a long
day,

And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz, (and Us without the z.

Painters who need his patience.) Well, all
these

Secured at their devotions, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I'm the
man!

Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's things by
mistake,

My old serge gown and rope that goes all
round,

I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?

Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so
fast!"

—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could Saint
John there draw—

His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?

We come to brother Lippo for all that,

Iste perfecit opus!" So, all smile—

I shuffle sideways with my blushing face

Under the cover of a hundred wings

Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're
gay

And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,

Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops

The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off

To some safe bench behind, not letting go

The palm of her, the little lily thing

That spoke the good word for me in the nick,

Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I
would say.

And so all's saved for me, and for the church

A pretty picture gained. Go, six months
hence!

Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights,
no lights!

The street's hushed, and I know my own
way back—

Don't fear me! There's the gray beginning.
Zooks!

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND.

I.

My love, this is the bitterest, that thou
Who art all truth and who dost love me now
As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to
say—
Should'st love so truly and could'st love me
still
A whole long life through, had but love its
will,
Would death that leads me from thee
brook delay !

II.

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
Would never let mine go, thy heart withstand
The beating of my heart to reach its place.
When should I look for thee and feel thee
gone?
When cry for the old comfort and find none?
Never, I know ! Thy soul is in thy face.

III.

Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so ! might I
save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul

Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves
that whole ;
Vainly the flesh fades—soul makes all
things new.

IV.

And 'twould not be because my eye grew dim
Thou could'st not find the love there, thanks
to Him

Who never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade
Remember whence it sprang nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest
grow dark.

V.

So, how thou would'st be perfect, white and
clean

Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
Alike, this body given to show it by !

Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's
abyss,

What plaudits from the next world after
this,

Could'st thou repeat a stroke and gain the
sky !

VI.

And is it not the bitterer to think
That, disengage our hands and thou wilt
sink

Although thy love was love in very deed ?

I know that nature ! Pass a festive day,
Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

VII.

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it
fell ;
If old things remain old things all is well,
For thou art grateful as becomes man
best :
And hadst thou only heard me play one tune,
Or viewed me from a window, not so soon
With thee would such things fade as with
the rest.

VIII.

I seem to see ! we meet and part : 'tis brief :
The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,
The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank ;
That is a portrait of me on the wall—
Three lines, my face comes at so slight a
call ;
And for all this, one little hour's to thank.

IX.

But now, because the hour through years
was fixed,
Because our inmost beings met and mixed,
Because thou once hast loved me—wilt
thou dare

Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,
"Therefore she is immortally my bride,
Chance cannot change that love, nor time
impair.

X.

"So, what if in the dusk of life that's left,
I, a tired traveller, of my sun bereft,
Look from my path when, mimicking the
same,
The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and
gone?
—Where was it till the sunset? where anon
It will be at the sunrise! what's to
blame?"

.XI.

Is it so helpful to thee? canst thou take
The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,
Put gently by such efforts at a beam?
Is the remainder of the way so long
Thou need'st the little solace, thou the
strong?
Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze
and dream!

XII.

"—Ah, but the fresher faces! Is it true,"
Thou'lt ask, "some eyes are beautiful and
new?
Some hair,—how can one choose but grasp
such wealth?"

And if a man would press his lips to lips
Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there
slips

The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth ?

XIII.

" It cannot change the love kept still for Her,
Much more than, such a picture to prefer

Passing a day with, to a room's bare side.
The painted form takes nothing she
possessed,

Yet while the Titian's Venus lies at rest

A man looks. Once more, what is there
to chide ? "

XIV.

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,
My own self sell myself, my hand attach

Its warrant to the very thefts from me—
Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,
Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,

Thy man's truth I was bold to bid God
see !

XV.

Love so, then, if thou wilt ! Give all thou
canst

Away to the new faces—disentranced—

(Say it and think it) obdurate no more,
Re-issue looks and words from the old mint—
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
Image and superscription once they bore !

XVI.

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,—
It all comes to the same thing at the end,
 Since mine thou wast, mine art, and mine
 shalt be,
Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum
Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
 Back to the heart's place here I keep for
 thee !

XVII.

Only, why should it be with stain at all ?
Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,
 Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow ?
Why need the other women know so much
And talk together, " Such the look and such
 The smile he used to love with, then as
 now ! "

XVIII.

Might I die last and shew thee ! Should
 I find
Such hardship in the few years left behind,
 If free to take and light my lamp, and go
Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit
Seeing thy face on those four sides of it
 The better that they are so blank, I know !

XIX.

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er
Within my mind each look, get more and
 more

By heart each word, too much to learn at
first,
And join thee all the fitter for the pause
'Neath the low doorway's lintel. That were
cause
For lingering, though thou calledst, if I
durst !

XX.

And yet thou art the nobler of us two.
What dare I dream of, that thou canst not
do,
Outstripping my ten small steps with one
stride ?
I'll say then, here's a trial and a task—
Is it to bear ?—if easy, I'll not ask—
Though love fail, I can trust on in thy
pride.

XXI.

Pride ?—when those eyes forestal the life
behind
The death I have to go through !—when I
find,
Now that I want thy help most, all of thee !
What did I fear ? Thy love shall hold me
fast
Until the little minute's sleep is past
And I wake saved.—And yet, it will not
be !

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA.

I.

THAT was I, you heard last night
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small :
Life was dead, and so was light.

II.

Not a twinkle from the fly,
Not a glimmer from the worm.
When the crickets stopped their cry,
When the owls forbore a term,
You heard music ; that was I.

III.

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
Sultrily suspired for proof :
In at heaven and out again,
Lightning !—where it broke the roof
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

IV.

What they could my words expressed,
O my love, my all, my one !

Singing helped the verses best,
And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

V.

So wore night ; the east was gray,
White the broad-faced hemlock flowers ;
Soon would come another day ;
Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had past away.

VI.

What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well ?
Say, this struck you—" When life gropes
Feebly for the path where fell
Light last on the evening slopes.

VII.

" One friend in that path shall be
To secure my steps from wrong ;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

VIII.

Never say—as something bodes—
" So the worst has yet a worse !
When life halts 'neath double loads,
Better the task-master's curse
Than such music on the roads !

IX.

“ When no moon succeeds the sun,
Nor can pierce the midnight's tent
Any star, the smallest one,
While some drops, where lightning went,
Show the final storm begun—

X.

“ When the fire-fly hides its spot,
When the garden-voices fail
In the darkness thick and hot,—
Shall another voice avail,
That shape be where those are not?

XI.

“ Has some plague a longer lease
Proffering its help uncouth?
Can't one even die in peace?
As one shuts one's eyes on youth,
Is that face the last one sees?”

XII.

Oh, how dark your villa was,
Windows fast and obdurate!
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood—the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!

"DE GUSTIBUS—"

I.

YOUR ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If loves remain)

In an English lane,

By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.

Hark, those two in the hazel coppice—

A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,

Making love, say,—

The happier they!

Draw yourself up from the light of the moon

And let them pass, as they will too soon,

With the beanflowers' boon,

And the blackbird's tune,

And May, and June!

II.

What I love best in all the world,

Is, a castle, precipice-encurled,

In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.

Or look for me, old fellow of mine,

(If I get my head from out the mouth

O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,

And come again to the land of lands)—

In a sea-side house to the farther south,

Where the baked cicalas die of drouth,

And one sharp tree ('tis a cypress) stands,

By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Without the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea, and not a break?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there's news to-day—the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling.
—She hopes they have not caught the felon;
Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me—
(When fortune's malice
Lost her, Calais.)
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, "Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she;
So it always was, so it still shall be!

WOMEN AND ROSES.

I.

I DREAM of a red-rose tree,
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

II.

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow the women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day.
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of
 maidens,
Beauties unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

III.

Dear rose, thy term is reached,
Thy leaf hangs loose and bleached :
Bees pass it unimpeached.

IV.

Stay then, stoop, since I cannot climb,
You, great shapes of the antique time !

How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,
Break my heart at your feet to please you?
Oh ! to possess, and be possessed !
Hearts that beat 'neath each pallid breast !
But once of love, the poesy, the passion,
Drink once and die !—In vain, the same
fashion,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

V.

Dear rose, thy joy's undimmed ;
Thy cup is ruby-rimmed,
Thy cup's heart nectar-brimmed

VI.

Deep as drops from a statue's plinth
The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
So will I bury me while burning,
Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
Eyes in your eyes, lips on your lips !
Fold me fast where the cincture slips,
Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure !
Girdle me once ? But no—in their old
measure
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

VII.

Dear rose without a thorn,
Thy bud's the babe unborn :
First streak of a new morn.

VIII.

Wings, lend wings for the cold, the clear !
What's far conquers what is near.
Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
Sprung from the dust where our own flesh
 moulders.
What shall arrive with the cycle's change ?
A novel grace and a beauty strange.
I will make an Eve, be the artist that began
 her,
Shaped her to his mind !—Alas ! in like
 manner
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO
ABD-EL-KADR.

[1842.]

I.

As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried
As I ride, as I ride.

II.

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride ?
Or are witnesses denied—
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride ?

III.

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned Homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied ?)
To reside—where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

IV.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and
dried,
—Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed—

How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride !

v.

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
As I ride, as I ride,
All that's meant me : satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride !

MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-
GOTHA.

I.

HIST, but a word, fair and soft !
Forth and be judged, Master Hugues !
Answer the question I've put you so oft—
What do you mean by your mountainous
fugues ?
See, we're alone in the loft,

II.

I, the poor organist here,
Hugues, the composer of note—

Dead, though, and done with, this many a
year—

Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,
Make the world prick up its ear !

III.

See, the church empties apace.

Fast they extinguish the lights—

Hallo, there, sacristan ! five minutes' grace !

Here's a crank pedal wants setting to
rights,

Baulks one of holding the base.

IV.

See, our huge house of the sounds

Hushing its hundreds at once,

Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds

—Oh, you may challenge them, not a
response

Get the church saints on their rounds !

V.

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt ?

—March, with the moon to admire,

Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,

Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,

Put rats and mice to the rout—

VI.

Aloys and Jurien and Just—

Order things back to their place,
Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,
Rub the church plate, darn the sacrament
lace,
Clear the desk velvet of dust.)

VII.

Here's your book, younger folks shelve !
Played I not off-hand and runningly,
Just now, your masterpiece, hard number
twelve ?
Here's what should strike,—could one
handle it cunningly.
Help the axe, give it a helve !

VIII.

Page after page as I played,
Every bar's rest where one wipes
Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and
surveyed
O'er my three clavier, yon forest of pipes
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

IX.

Sure you were wishful to speak,
You, with brow ruled like a score,

Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
Like two great breves, as they wrote them
of yore,
Each side that bar, your straight beak !

X.

Sure you said—" Good, the mere notes !
Still, couldst thou take my intent,
Know what procured me our Company's
votes—
Masters being lauded and sciolists shent,
Parted the sheep from the goats ! "

XI.

Well then, speak up, never flinch !
Quick, ere my candle's a snuff .
—Burnt, do you see ? to its uttermost
inch—
I believe in you, but that's not enough
Give my conviction a clinch !

XII.

First you deliver your phrase
—Nothing propound, that I see,
Fit in itself for much blame or much praise—
Answered no less, where no answer needs
be :
Off start the Two on their ways !

XIII.

Straight must a Third interpose,
Volunteer needlessly help—
In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his
nose,
So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,
Argument's hot to the close !

XIV.

One dissertates, he is candid—
Two must discept,—has distinguished !
Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did :
Four protests, Five makes a dart at the
thing wished—
Back to One, goes the case bandied !

XV.

One says his say with a difference—
More of expounding, explaining !
All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance—
Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-
restraining—
Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

XVI.

One is incisive, corrosive—
Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant—

Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive—

Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant—

Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve !

XVII.

Now, they ply axes and crowbars—

Now, they prick pins at a tissue

Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's

Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue ?

Where is our gain at the Two-bars ?

XVIII.

Est fuga, volvitur rota !

On we drift. Where looms the dim port ?

One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their quota—

Something is gained, if one caught but the import—

Show it us—Hugues of Saxe-Gotha !

XIX.

What with affirming, denying.

Holding, risposting, subjoining,

All's like . . . it's like . . . for an instance

I'm trying . . .

There ! See our roof, its gilt moulding and groining

Under those spider-webs lying !

XX.

So your figure broadens and thickens,
Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
Till one exclaims—"But where's music, the
dickens?"

Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web
strengthens
Blackened to the stoutest of tickens?"

XXI.

I for man's effort am zealous.
Prove me such censure's unfounded!
Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—
Hopes 'twas for something his organ-pipes
sounded,
Tiring three boys at the bellows?

XXII.

Is it your moral of Life?
Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his
shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife?

XXIII.

Over our heads Truth and Nature—
Still our life's zigzags and dodges,
Ins and outs weaving a new legislature—

God's gold just shining its last where that
lodges
Palled beneath Man's usurpature !

XXIV.

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland.
Nothings grow something which quietly
closes
Heaven's earnest eye,—not a glimpse of
the far land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

XXV.

Ah, but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)
So many men with such various intentions
Down the past ages must know more than
this age !
Leave the web all its dimensions !

XXVI.

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf?
Proved a mere mountain in labour?
Better submit—try again—what's the clef?
'Faith, it's no trifle for pipe and for
tabor—
Four flats—the minor in F.

XXVII.

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger.

Learning it once, who would lose it?

Yet all the while a misgiving will linger—

Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse
it—

Nature, thro' dust-clouds we fling her?

XXVIII.

Hugues! I advise *meâ pænâ*

(Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)

Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the
arena!

Say the word, straight I unstop the Full-
Organ,

Blare out the *mode Palestrina*.

XXIX.

While in the roof, if I'm right there—

. . . Lo, you, the wick in the socket!

Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!

Down it dips, gone like a rocket!

What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
Sweeping the church up for first morning-
prayers,

And find a poor devil at end of his cares

At the foot of your rotten-planked rat-
riddled stairs?

Do I carry the moon in my pocket?

BEFORE.

I.

LET them fight it out, *friend*! things have
gone too far.
God must judge the couple! leave them as
they are
—Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory,
And whichever one the guilt's with, to my
story.

II.

Why, you would not bid men, sunk in such
a slough,
Strike no arm out further, stick and stink as
now,
Leaving right and wrong to settle the em-
broilment,
Heaven with snaky Hell, in torture and
entailment?

III.

Which of them's the culprit, how must he
conceive
God's the queen he caps to, laughing in his
sleeve!
'Tis but decent to profess oneself beneath
her.
Still, one must not be too much in earnest
either.

IV.

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes,
Then go live his life out! life will try his
nerves,
When the sky, which noticed all, makes no
disclosure,
And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.

V.

Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls of
rose,
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze him
as he goes.
For he 'ginsto guess the purpose of the garden,
With the sly mute thing beside there for a
warden.

VI.

What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant to
his side,
A leer and lie in every eye on its obsequious
hide?
When will come an end of all the mock
obeisance,
And the price appear that pays for the mis-
feasance?

VII.

So much for the culprit. Who's the martyred
man?
Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure he
can.

He that strove thus evil's lump with good to
leaven,
Let him give his blood at last and get his
heaven.

VIII.

All or nothing, stake it ! trusts he God or no ?
Thus far and no farther ? farther ? be it so.
Now, enough of your chicane of prudent
pauses,
Sage provisos, sub-intents, and saving-
clauses.

IX.

Ah, "forgive" you bid him ? While God's
champion lives,
Wrong shall be resisted : dead, why he
forgives.
But you must not end my friend ere you
begin him ;
Evil stands not crowned on earth, while
breath is in him.

X.

Once more—Will the wronger, at this last of
all,
Dare to say "I did wrong," rising in his
fall ?
No ?—Let go, then—both the fighters to
their places—
While I count three, step you back as many
paces.

AFTER.

TAKE the cloak from his face, and at first
Let the corpse do its worst.

How he lies in his rights of a man !
Death has done all death can.
And absorbed in the new life he leads,
He recks not, he heeds
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance—both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.

Ha, what avails death to erase
His offence, my disgrace ?
I would we were boys as of old
In the field, by the fold—
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn
Were so easily borne.

I stand here now, he lies in his place—
Cover the face.

IN THREE DAYS.

I.

So, I shall see her in three days
And just one night, but nights are short,

Then two long hours, and that is morn.
See how I come, unchanged, unworn—
Feel, where my life broke off from thine,
How fresh the splinters keep and fine,—
Only a touch and we combine !

II.

Too long, this time of year, the days !
But nights—at least the nights are short.
As night shows where her one moon is,
A hand's-breadth of pure light and bliss,
So, life's night gives my lady birth
And my eyes hold her ! what is worth
The rest of heaven, the rest of earth ?

III.

O loaded curls, release your store
Of warmth and scent as once before
The tingling hair did, lights and darks
Out-breaking into fairy sparks
When under curl and curl I pried
After the warmth and scent inside,
Thro' lights and darks how manifold—
The dark inspired, the light controlled !
As early Art embrowned the gold.

IV.

What great fear—should one say, “Three
days
That change the world, might change as
well

Your fortune ; and if joy delays,
Be happy that no worse befell."
What small fear—if another says,
" Three days and one short night beside
May throw no shadow on your ways ;
But years must teem with change untried,
With chance not easily defied,
With an end somewhere undescried."
No fear !—or if a fear be born
This minute, it dies out in scorn.
Fear ? I shall see her in three days
And one night, now the nights are short,
Then just two hours, and that is morn.

IN A YEAR.

I.

NEVER any more
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before.
Once his love grown chill,
Mine may strive—
Bitterly we re-embrace,
Single still.

II.

Was it something said,
Something done,

Vexed him? was it touch of hand,
Turn of head?
Strange! that very way
Love begun.
I as little understand
Love's decay.

III.

When I sewed or drew,
I recall
How he looked as if I sang,
—Sweetly too.
If I spoke a word,
First of all
Up his cheek the colour sprang,
Then he heard.

IV.

Sitting by my side,
At my feet,
So he breathed the air I breathed,
Satisfied!
I, too, at love's brim
Touched the sweet:
I would die if death bequeathed
Sweet to him.

V.

“Speak, I love thee best!”
He exclaimed.

“ Let thy love my own foretell,—”
I confessed :
“ Clasp my heart on thine
Now unblamed,
Since upon thy soul as well
Hangeth mine ! ”

VI.

Was it wrong to own,
Being truth ?
Why should all the giving prove
His alone ?
I had wealth and ease,
Beauty, youth—
Since my lover gave me love,
I gave these.

VII

That was all I meant,
—To be just,
And the passion I had raised
To content.
Since he chose to change
Gold for dust,
If I gave him what he praised
Was it strange ?

VIII.

Would he loved me yet,
On and on,

While I found some way undreamed
—Paid my debt !
Gave more life and more,
Till, all gone,
He should smile, “ She never seemed
Mine before.

IX.

“ What—she felt the while,
Must I think ?
Love’s so different with us men,”
He should smile.
“ Dying for my sake
White and pink !
Can’t we touch these bubbles then
But they break ? ”

X.

Dear, the pang is brief,
Do thy part,
Have thy pleasure. How perplex
Grows belief !
Well, this cold clay clod
Was man’s heart.
Crumble it—and what comes next ?
Is it God ?

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM
ABROAD.

I.

OH, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood
 sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard
 bough
In England—now !

II.

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the
 swallows—
Hark ! where my blossomed pear-tree in the
 hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—a tthe bent spray's
 edge—
That's the wise thrush ; he sings each song
 twice over,

Lest you should think he never could re-
capture
The first fine careless rapture !
And though the fields look rough with hoary
dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes
anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower,
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-
flower !

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA.

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the
north-west died away ;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking
into Cadiz Bay ;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face
Trafalgar lay ;
In the dimmest north-east distance, dawned
Gibraltar grand and gray ;
“ Here and here did England help me,—
how can I help England ? ”—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God
to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over
Africa.

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL.

A PICTURE OF FANO.

I.

DEAR and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him,
for me !

Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still, to quiet and retrieve.

II.

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where
I gaze,
And suddenly my head be covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child
who prays
Now on that tomb—and I shall feel thee
guarding
Me, out of all the world ; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes
its door !

III.

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I
know,

For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend
me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands
together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garments
spread?

IV.

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My head beneath thine, while thy healing
hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought
expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and supprest.

V.

How soon all worldly wrong would be
repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and
skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! love is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or
declared?

VI.

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
 (Alfred, dear friend) that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
 Pressed gently,—with his own head turned
 away
Over the earth where so much lay before
 him
Of work to do, though heaven was opening
 o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII.

We were at Fano, and three times we went
 To sit and see him in his chapel there.
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
 —My angel with me too : and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
 Fraught with a pathos so magnificent).

VIII.

And since he did not work so earnestly
 At all times, and has else endured some
 wrong,—
I took one thought his picture struck from
 me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.

My Love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?

How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?
This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

“HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD
NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX.”

[16—.]

I.

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all
three;

“Good speed!” cried the watch, as the gate-
bolts undrew;

“Speed!” echoed the wall to us gallop-
ing through;

Behind shut the postern, the lights sank
to rest,

And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II.

Not a word to each other; we kept the
great pace

Neck by neck, stride by stride, never
changing our place;

I turned in my saddle and made its girths
tight,

Then shortened each stirrup, and set the
pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker
the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we
drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned
clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out
to see;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as
could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard
the half-chime,
So Joris broke silence with, "Yet there
is time!"

IV.

At Aerschot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black
every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping
past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at
last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its
spray.

v.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp
ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out
on his track ;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that
glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master,
askance !
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye
and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

vi.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned ; and cried Joris,
“ Stay spur !
“ Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's
not in her,
“ We'll remember at Aix ”—for one heard
the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and
staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the
flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered
and sank.

vii.

So we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in
the sky ;



The broad sun above laughed a pitiless
laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright
stubble like chaff ;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang
white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is
in sight !"

viii.

"How they'll greet us !"—and all in a
moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a
stone ;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole
weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix
from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the
brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets'
rim.

ix.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster
let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and
all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse
without peer ;

Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any
noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and
stood.

x.

And all I remember is, friends flocking round
As I sate with his head 'twixt my knees on
the ground,
And no voice but was praising this Roland of
mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure
of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common
consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good
news from Ghent.

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S.

1.

OH, Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to
find !
I can hardly misconceive you ; it would
prove me deaf and blind ;
But although I give you credit, 'tis with
such a heavy mind !

II.

Here you come with your old music, and
here's all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice, where
the merchants were the kings,
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used
to wed the sea with rings?

III.

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and
'tis arched by . . . what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it,
where they kept the carnival!
I was never out of England—it's as if I saw
it all!

IV.

Did young people take their pleasure when
the sea was warm in May?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning
ever to mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the
morrow, do you say?

V.

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round
and lips so red,—
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a
bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a
man might base his head?

VI.

Well (and it was graceful of them) they'd
break talk off and afford
—She, to bite her mask's black velvet, he to
finger on his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately
at the clavichord?

VII.

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive,
sixths diminished sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions,
those solutions—"Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths—"Life might
last! we can but try!"

VIII.

"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are
you still as happy?"—"Yes—and you?"
—"Then more kisses"—"Did *I* stop them,
when a million seemed so few?"
Hark—the dominant's persistence, till it
must be answered to!

IX.

So an octave struck the answer. Oh, they
praised you, I dare say!
"Brave Galuppi! that was music! good
alike at grave and gay!
I can always leave off talking, when I hear
a master play."

X.

Then they left you for their pleasure : till in
due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some
with deeds as well undone,
Death came tacitly and took them where
they never see the sun.

XI.

But when I sit down to reason,—think to
take my stand nor swerve
Till I triumph o'er a secret wrung from
nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music, till I
creep thro' every nerve.

XII.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking
where a house was burned—
“Dust and ashes, dead and done with,
Venice spent what Venice earned !
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a
soul can be discerned.

XIII.

“Yours for instance, you know physics,
something of geology,
Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall
rise in their degree ;
Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not
die, it cannot be !

XIV.

“As for Venice and its people, merely born
to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth
and folly were the crop,
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the
kissing had to stop?

XV.

“Dust and ashes!” So you creak it, and
I want the heart to scold.
Dear dead women, with such hair, too—
what’s become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I
feel chilly and grown old.

MEMORABILIA.

I.

AH, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you?
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems, and new!

II.

But you were living before that.
And you are living after,
And the memory I started at—
My starting moves your laughter.

III.

I crossed a moor with a name of its own
And a use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about—

IV.

For there I picked up on the heather
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather—
Well, I forget the rest.

ANDREA DEL SARTO.

(CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER.")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your
heart ?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never
fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it ?
tenderly ?
Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love !

I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in
mine

And look a half hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly, the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow how you shall be glad for this !
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls
inside.

Don't count the time lost, either ; you must
serve

For each of the five pictures we require—
It saves a model. So ! keep looking so—
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds !
—How could you ever prick those perfect
ears,

Even to put the pearl there ! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's : very dear, no
less !

You smile ? why, there's my picture ready
made.

There's what we painters call our harmony !
A common grayness silvers everything,—

All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know), but I, at every
point ;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned
down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-
top ;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside ;
The last monk leaves the garden ; days
decrease
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's
hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes
us lead !
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are :
I feel he laid the fether : let it lie !
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that's behind us ! you don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art.
But you can hear at least when people
speak ;
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love ! so such things
should be—

Behold Madonna, I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say perfectly
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are
judge

Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!

No sketches first, no studies, that's long
past—

I do what many dream of all their lives—
—Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty
such

On twice your fingers, and not leave this
town,

Who strive—you don't know how the others
strive

To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,
Yet do much less, so much less, some one
says,

(I know his name, no matter) so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia! I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed, beating, stuffed and stopped-
up brain,

Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to
prompt

This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand
of mine.

Their works drop groundward, but them-
selves, I know,

Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to
me,

Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the
world.

My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils
too.

I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's
blame

Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken—what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered—what of
that?

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his
grasp,

Or what's a Heaven for? all is silver-gray
Placid and perfect with my art—the worst!
I know both what I want and what might
gain—

And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
“Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world!”
No doubt.

Yonder's a work, now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.

('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)

Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to
see,

Reaching, that Heaven might so replenish
him,

Above and through his art—for it gives
way ;

That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak ! its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may under-
stand.

Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it.
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me ! out of me ! And wherefore
out ?

Had you enjoined them on me, given me
soul,

We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I
think—

More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect
brow,

And perfect eyes, and more than perfect
mouth,

And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—

Had you, with these the same, but brought
a mind !

Some women do so. Had the mouth there
urged

“ God and the glory ! never care for gain.

The present by the future, what is that ?

Live for fame, side by side with Angelo—

Rafael is waiting. Up to God all three ! ”

I might have done it for you. So it seems—

Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.

Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;

The rest avail not. Why do I need you ?

What wife had Rafael, or has Angelo ?

In this world, who can do a thing, will not—

And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :

Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too,
the power—

And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,

God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.

'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,

That I am something underrated here,

Poor this long while, despised, to speak the
truth.

I dared not, do you know, leave home all
day,

For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.

The best is when they pass and look aside ;

But they speak sometimes ; I must bear
it all.

Well may they speak ! That Francis, that
first time,

And that long festal year at Fontainebleau !
I surely then could sometimes leave the
ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden
look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the
smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
You painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire
of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those
hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the back-ground, waiting on my
work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days ?
And had you not grown restless—but I
know—
'Tis done and past ; 'twas right, my instinct
said ;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray—
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should
tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make
his world.

How could it end in any other way?

You called me, and I came home to your heart.

The triumph was to have ended there—then if I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?

Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,

You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!

“Rafael did this, Andrea painted that—

The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife—”

Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.

For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Angelo, his very self,

To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .

(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts

Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)

“Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares
how,

Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are pricked on by your popes and kings,

Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!”

To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.

I hardly dare—yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line
should go !

Ay, but the soul ! he's Rafael ! rub it out !
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he ? why, who but Michael Angelo ?
Do you forget already words like those ?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost,
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more
pleased.

Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed !
This hour has been an hour ! Another smile ?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend ?
I mean that I should earn more, give you
more.

See, it is settled dusk now ; there's a star ;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights shew the
wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them
by.

Come from the window, Love,—come in,
at last,

Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me. Oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with !
Let us but love each other. Must you go ?

That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you—you, and not with me?

Those loans!

More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for
that?

Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to
spend?

While hand and eye and something of a
heart

Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it
worth?

I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit

The gray remainder of the evening out,

Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly

How I could paint were I but back in France,

One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,

Not yours this time! I want you at my side

To hear them—that is, Michael Angelo—

Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.

Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.

I take the subjects for his corridor,

Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,

And throw him in another thing or two

If he demurs; the whole should prove enough

To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,

What's better and what's all I care about,

Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff.

Love, does that please you? Ah, but what
does he,

The Cousin! what does he to please you
more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis! it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all
is said.

My father and my mother died of want,
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear
his lot.

They were born poor, lived poor, and poor
they died:

And I have laboured somewhat in my
time

And not been paid profusely. Some good
son

Paint my two hundred pictures—let him
try!

No doubt, there's something strikes a
balance. Yes,

You loved me quite enough, it seems to-
night.

This must suffice me here. What would one
have?

In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more
chance—

Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Angelo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,

While I have mine ! So—still they over-
come
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.
Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

CLEON.

“ As certain also of your own poets have said ”—

CLEON the poet (from the sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
And laugh their pride when the light wave
lisps “ Greece ”),—
To Protus in his Tyranny : much health !

They give thy letter to me, even now :
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift ; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee :
And one white she-slave from the group
dispersed
Of black and white slaves, (like the chequer-
work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and
gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves)
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest

Woven of sea-wools, with her two white
hands

Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence !
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life ;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad
enough

For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of
toil,

Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's
sake—

Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
Whence, all the tumult of the building
hushed,

Thou first of men mightst look out to the
east.

The vulgar saw thy tower ; thou sawest
the sun.

For this, I promise on thy festival
To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,

Making this slave narrate thy fortunes,
 speak
Thy great words, and describe thy royal
 face—
Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the
 most
Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me
 here.

It is as thou hast heard : in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
Is mine—and also mine the little chaunt,
So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their
 nets.

The image of the sun-god on the phare,
Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine ;
The Pœcile, o'er-storied its whole length,
As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine
 too.

I know the true proportions of a man
And woman also, not observed before ;
And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.
For music,—why, I have combined the
 moods,
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine ;

Thus much the people know and recognise,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel
not.

We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,
Look not so great (beside their simple way)
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point, and no other at a time,—
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way,—not ours, nor meant for
ours,

And ours is greater, had we skill to know.
Yet, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements
here,

Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analysed to parts,
But each part having reference to all,—
How shall a certain part, pronounced com-
plete,

Endure effacement by another part?
Was the thing done?—Then what's to do
again?

See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—
He did not overlay them, superimpose
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,

Making at last a picture ; there it lies.
So, first the perfect separate forms were
made,
The portions of mankind—and after, so,
Occurred the combination of the same.
Or where had been a progress, otherwise ?
Mankind, made up of all the single men,—
In such a synthesis the labour ends.
Now, mark me—those divine men of old time
Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one
point
The outside verge that rounds our faculty ;
And where they reached, who can do more
than reach ?
It takes but little water just to touch
At some one point the inside of a sphere,
And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the
rest
In due succession : but the finer air
Which not so palpably nor obviously,
Though no less universally, can touch
The whole circumference of that emptied
sphere,
Fills it more fully than the water did ;
Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
Resolved into a subtler element.
And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
Up to the visible height—and after, void ;
Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to
Zeus

To vindicate his purpose in its life—
Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
That he or other God, descended here
And, once for all, showed simultaneously
What, in its nature, never can be shown
Piecemeal or in succession;—showed, I say,
The worth both absolute and relative
Of all His children from the birth of time,
His instruments for all appointed work.
I now go on to image,—might we hear
The judgment which should give the due to
each,
Show where the labour lay and where the
ease,
And prove Zeus' self, the latent, everywhere!
This is a dream. But no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the
springs
Follow each other with unwaning powers—
The grapes which dye thy wine, are richer
far
Through culture, than the wild wealth of
the rock;
The suave plum than the savage-tasted
drupe;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn
flowers;
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy
slave,

Sleeping upon her robe as if on clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer's, no—
Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor
carved

And painted men like Phildias and his friend :
I am not great as they are, point by point :
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each others' arts.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
'The wild flower was the larger—I have
dashed

Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to
fruit,

And show a better flower if not so large.
I stand, myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is ! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand—what
then?

I pass too surely—let at least truth stay !

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicoloured kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men—

Thou askest if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life.
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,
I face death with success in my right hand :
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men. " For " (writest thou)
" Thou leavest much behind, while I leave
nought :

Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study ; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy
Dies altogether with my brain and arm
Is lost indeed ; since,—what survives myself?
The brazen statue that o'erlooks my grave,
Set on the promontory which I named.
And that—some supple courtier of my heir
Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
I go, then : triumph thou, who dost not go !".

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole
mind.

Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows ?
That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part, to grace the aftertime ?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere aught had been recorded, aught per-
ceived,

Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst
have looked

On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,
Ere man had yet appeared upon the stage—
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and
deduced

The perfectness of others yet unseen.

Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned
thee

“Wilt thou go on a step, improve on this,
Do more for visible creatures than is done?”
Thou wouldst have answered, “Ay, by
making each

Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.
All's perfect else: the shell sucks fast the
rock,

The fish strikes through the sea, the snake
both swims

And slides; the birds take flight, forth range
the beasts,

Till life's mechanics can no further go—

And all this joy in natural life is put
Like fire from off Thy finger into each,
So exquisitely perfect is the same.

But 'tis pure fire—and they mere matter are;
It has them, not they it: and so I choose,
For man, Thy last premeditated work
(If I might add a glory to this scheme)

That a third thing should stand apart from
both,

A quality arise within the soul,

Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself,
And so be happy." Man might live at first
The animal life: but is there nothing more?
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives; and, the more he gets to
 know
Of his own life's adaptabilities,
The more joy-giving will his life become.
The man who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably
 said:
"Let progress end at once,—man make no
 step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense."
In man there's failure, only since he left
The lower and unconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
A spirit might grow conscious of that life,
And, by new lore so added to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head.
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the
 soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural
 life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;
A tower that crowns a country. But, alas!
The soul now climbs it just to perish there,

For thence we have discovered ('tis no
dream—

We know this, which we had not else perceived)

That there's a world of capability

For joy, spread round about us, meant
for us,

Inviting us ; and still the soul craves all,

And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot
more

Than ere you climbed the tower to look
abroad !

Nay, so much less, as that fatigue has
brought

Deduction to it." We struggle—fain to
enlarge

Our bounded physical recipiency,

Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,

Repair the waste of age and sickness. No,

It skills not : life's inadequate to joy,

As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.

They praise a fountain in my garden here

Wherein a Naiad sends the water-spurt

Thin from her tube ; she smiles to see it rise.

What if I told her, it is just a thread

From that great river which the hills shut up,

And mock her with my leave to take the
same ?

The artificer has given her one small tube

Past power to widen or exchange—what
boots

To know she might spout oceans if she
could?

She cannot lift beyond her first straight
thread,

And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to
boast,

"See, man, how happy I live, and despair—
That I may be still happier—for thy use!"

If this were so, we could not thank our
Lord,

As hearts beat on to doing: 'tis not so—
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?

Still, no. If care—where is the sign, I ask—
And get no answer: and agree in sum,
O king, with thy profound discouragement,
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.

Most progress is most failure! thou sayest
well.

The last point now:—thou dost except a
case—

Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts—to such a man as I—
Who leave behind me living works indeed;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than
thine)

With feeling joy? confound the knowing how

And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living?—Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise,
can act—

Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Phœbus, am I therefore
young?

Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art!
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is
more :

But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something
too.

Yon rower with the moulded muscles there
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
I can write love-odes—thy fair slave's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too gray
For being beloved : she turns to that young
man,

The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship : well—thou art
king !

“But,” sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat,
To find thee tripping on a mere word) “what
Thou writest, paintest, stays : that does not
die :

Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,

And Æschylus, because we read his plays !”
Why, if they live still, let them come and
take

Thy slave in my despite—drink from thy
cup—

Speak in my place. Thou diest while I
survive ?

Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,—
In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
In power and insight) more enlarged, more
keen ;

While every day my hairs fall more and
more,

My hand shakes, and the heavy years
increase—

The horror quickening still from year to
year,

The consummation coming past escape
When I shall know most, and yet least
enjoy—

When all my works wherein I prove my
worth,

Being present still to mock me in men’s
mouths,

Alive still, in the phrase of such as thou,
I, I, the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over much,
Shall sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,

Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us.
That, stung by straitness of our life, made
 strait

On purpose to make sweet the life at large—
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call
 death,

We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings.
 But no!

Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas!
He must have done so—were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought
 die,
Glad for what was. Farewell. And for the
 rest,

I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus—we have heard his
 fame

Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—
I know not, nor am troubled much to
 know.

Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one.
As if his answer could impose at all.

He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached
him and Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrines could be held by no sane man.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE.

I.—JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE
WINDOW.

I.

AH, Love, but a day
And the world has changed!
The sun's away,
And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged:
Summer has stopped.

II.

Look in my eyes!
Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true,
With the changing year?

III.

Thou art a man,
But I am thy love.
For the lake, its swan ;
For the dell, its dove ;
And for thee—(oh, haste !)
Me to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

II.—BY THE FIRESIDE.

I.

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,
Oak and pine ?
Oh, for the ills half-understood,
The dim dead woe
Long ago
Befallen this bitter coast of France !
Well, poor sailors took their chance ;
I take mine.

II.

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot
O'er the sea :
Do sailors eye the casement—mute,
Drenched and stark,
From their bark—
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate
O' the warm safe house and happy freight
Thee and me ?

III.

God help you, sailors, at your need !
 Spare the curse !
 For some ships, safe in port indeed,
 Rot and rust,
 Run to dust,
 All through worms i' the wood, which crept,
 Gnawed our hearts out while we slept :
 That is worse.

IV.

Who lived here before us two ?
 Old-world pairs.
 Did a woman ever—would I knew !—
 Watch the man
 With whom began
 Love's voyage full-sail,—(now, gnash your
 teeth !)
 When planks start, open hell beneath
 Unawares ?

III.—IN THE DOORWAY.

I.

THE swallow has set her six young on the
 rail,
 And looks seaward :
 The water's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
 To the leeward,—

On the weather-side, black, spotted white
with the wind.

“Good fortune departs, and disaster’s behind,”—

Hark, the wind with its wants and its
infinite wail !

II.

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness,
has furled

Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
Where there lingers

No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her
sake :

How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled
on its stake !

My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks
curled.

III.

Yet here are we two ; we have love, house
enough,

With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and
rough,

Though it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a
bent ;

If a magpie alight now, it seems an event ;
And they both will be gone at November’s
rebuff.

IV.

But why must cold spread? but wherefore
bring change
 To the spirit,
God meant should mate his with an infinite
range,
 And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and
cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be
bold!
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter
estrangle!

IV.—ALONG THE BEACH.

I.

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,
And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love—is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do:
 What has come of it all along?

II.

I took you—how could I otherwise?
For a world to me, and more;
For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God's a-glow, to the loving eyes,
In what was mere earth before.

III.

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth !
Now do I mis-state, mistake ?
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth ?
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,
Seal my sense up for your sake ?

IV.

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love ! not so, indeed !
You were just weak earth, I knew :
With much in you waste, with many a weed,
And plenty of passions run to seed,
But a little good grain too.

V.

And such as you were, I took you for mine :
Did not you find me yours,
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
Would flow, as the Book assures ?

VI.

Well; and if none of these good things came,
What did the failure prove ?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to
blame,
And, either or both, to love.

VII.

Yet this turns now to a fault—there ! there !
That I do love, watch too long,

And wait too well, and weary and wear ;
And 'tis all an old story, and my despair
Fit subject for some new song :

VIII.

“How the light, light love, he has wings
to fly
“At suspicion of a bond :
“My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-
bye,
“Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,
“And why should you look beyond?”

V.—ON THE CLIFF.

I.

I LEANED on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf ;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock :
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

II.

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face :
No iron like that !
Baked dry ; of a weed, of a shell, no trace :
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III.

On the turf, sprang gay
 With his films of blue,
 No cricket, I'll say,
 But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,
 The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
 Real fairy, with wings all right.

IV.

On the rock, they scorch
 Like a drop of fire
 From a brandished torch,
 Fall two red fans of a butterfly :
 No turf, no rock : in their ugly stead,
 See, wonderful blue and red !

V.

Is it not so
 With the minds of men ?
 The level and low,
 The burnt and bare, in themselves ; but then
 With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,—
 Love settling unawares !

VI.—READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF.

I.

“STILL ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or
 no ?

“Which needs the other's office, thou or I ?

“Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,
“And can, in truth, my voice untie
“Its links, and let it go?

II.

“Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would
be righted,
“Entrusting thus thy cause to me? For-
bear!
“No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith,
requited
“With falsehood,—love, at last aware
“Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

III.

“We have them; but I know not any tone
“So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:
“Dost think men would go mad without a
moan,
“If they knew any way to borrow
“A pathos like thy own?

IV.

“Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs?
The one
“So long escaping from lips starved and
blue,
“That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
“Stretches her length; her foot comes
through
“The straw she shivers on;

V.

"You had not thought she was so tall : and
spent,
"Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers
shut
"Close, close, their sharp and livid nails
indent
"The clammy palm ; then all is mute :
"That way, the spirit went.

VI.

"Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
"Thy will to help me?—like the dog I
found
"Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
"Who would not take my food, poor
hound,
"But whined and licked my hand."

VII.

All this, and more, comes from some young
man's pride
Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—
Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried :

VIII.

Instances he must—simply recognise?
Oh, more than so !—must, with a learner's
zeal,

Make doubly prominent, twice emphasise,
By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

IX.

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the
rest !

Himself the undefeated that shall be :
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—
His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest !

X.

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what
the wind
Means in its moaning—by the happy
prompt
Instinctive way of youth, I mean ; for kind
Calm years, exacting their accompt
Of pain, mature the mind :

XI.

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
Just about daybreak, as he looks across
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul,—

XII.

Then, when the wind begins among the vines
So low, so low, what shall it say but this ?

"Here is the change beginning, here the
lines

"Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss

"The limit time assigns."

XIII.

Nothing can be as it has been before ;

Better, so call it, only not the same.

To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,

And keep it changeless ! such our claim :

So answered,—Never more !

XIV.

Simple ? Why this is the old woe o' the
world ;

Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and
die.

Rise with it, then ! Rejoice that man is
hurled

From change to change unceasingly,

His soul's wings never furled !

XV.

That's a new question ; still replies the fact,
Nothing endures : the wind moans, saying
so ;

We moan in acquiescence : there's life's pact,
Perhaps probation—do I know ?

God does : endure his act !

XVI.

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
On his soul's hands' palms one fair good
wise thing
Just as he grasped it ! For himself, death's
wave ;
While time first washes—ah, the sting !—
O'er all he'd sink to save.

VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS.

I.

OH, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning ! How he sets his
bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees
and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth ;
Listening the while, where on the heap of
stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters
sweet.

II.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true ;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and
knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you :
Make the low nature better by your throes !
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above !

VIII.—BESIDE THE DRAWING BOARD.

I.

“As like as a Hand to another Hand !”

Whoever said that foolish thing,
Could not have studied to understand
The counsels of God in fashioning,
Out of the infinite love of his heart,
This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart
From the world of wonder left to praise,
If I tried to learn the other ways
Of love in its skill, or love in its power.

“As like as a Hand to another Hand” ,

Who said that, never took his stand,
Found and followed, like me, an hour,
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear, almost,—of the limit-line !
As I looked at this, and learned and drew,
Drew and learned, and looked again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
Its beauty mounted into my brain,
And a fancy seized me ; I was fain
To efface my work, begin anew,
Kiss what before I only drew ;
Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips,
With soul to help if the mere lips failed,
I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,
Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips
Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

II.

'Tis a clay cast, the perfect thing,
From Hand live once, dead long ago :
Princess-like it wears the ring
To fancy's eye, by which we know
That here at length a master found
His match, a proud lone soul its mate,
As soaring genius sank to ground,
And pencil could not emulate
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear almost !—of the limit-line.
Long ago the god, like me
The worm, learned, each in our degree :
Looked and loved, learned and drew,
Drew and learned and loved again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
Till beauty mounted into his brain
And on the finger which outvied
His art he placed the ring that's there,
Still by fancy's eye descried,
In token of a marriage rare :
For him on earth, his art's despair,
For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

III.

Little girl with the poor coarse hand
I turned from to a cold clay cast—
I have my lesson, understand
The worth of flesh and blood at last.
Nothing but beauty in a Hand ?

Because he could not change the hue,
Mend the lines and make them true
To this which met his soul's demand,—
Would Da Vinci turn from you ?
I hear him laugh my woes to scorn—
“ The fool forsooth is all forlorn
“ Because the beauty, she thinks best,
“ Lived long ago or was never born,—
“ Because no beauty bears the test
“ In this rough peasant Hand ! Confessed !
“ ‘ Art is null and study void ! ’
“ So sayest thou ? So said not I,
“ Who threw the faulty pencil by,
“ And years instead of hours employed,
“ Learning the veritable use
“ Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath
“ Lines and hue of the outer sheath,
“ If haply I might reproduce
“ One motive of the powers profuse,
“ Flesh and bone and nerve that make
“ The poorest coarsest human hand
“ An object worthy to be scanned
“ A whole life long for their sole sake.
“ Shall earth and the cramped moment-space
“ Yield the heavenly crowning grace ?
“ Now the parts and then the whole !
“ Who art thou, with stinted soul
“ And stunted body, thus to cry
“ ‘ I love,—shall that be life's strait dole ?
“ ‘ I must live beloved or die ! ’

“ This peasant hand that spins the wool
“ And bakes the bread, why lives it on,
“ Poor and coarse with beauty gone,—
“ What use survives the beauty ? ” Fool !

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand !
I have my lesson, shall understand.

IX.—ON DECK.

I.

THERE is nothing to remember in me,
Nothing I ever said with a grace,
Nothing I did that you care to see,
Nothing I was that deserves a place
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

II.

Conceded ! In turn, concede to me,
Such things have been as a mutual flame.
Your soul's locked fast ; but, love for a key,
You might let it loose, till I grew the
same
In your eyes, as in mine you stand : strange
plea !

III.

For then, then, what would it matter to me
That I was the harsh ill-favoured one ?
We both should be like as pea and pea ;
It was ever so since the world begun :
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

IV.

How strange it were if you had all me,
As I have all you in my heart and
brain,
You, whose least word brought gloom or
glee,
Who never lifted the hand in vain—
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea !

V.

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
Rose like your own face present now,
With eyes as dear in their due degree,
Much such a mouth, and as bright a
brow,
Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'Tis
She !"

VI.

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love ;
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
A passion to stand as your thoughts
approve,
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

VII.

But did one touch of such love for me
Come in a word or a look of yours,

Whose words and looks will, circling, flee
 Round me and round while life endures,—
 Could I fancy “As I feel, thus feels he”;

VIII.

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
 And your hair grow these coarse hanks of
 hair,
 Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—
 You might turn myself!—should I know
 or care
 When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

ONE WAY OF LOVE.

I.

ALL June I bound the rose in sheaves.
 Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves.
 And strew them where Pauline may pass.
 She will not turn aside? Alas!
 Let them lie. Suppose they die?
 The chance was they might take her eye.

II.

How many a month I strove to suit
 These stubborn fingers to the lute!
 To-day I venture all I know.
 She will not hear my music? So!

Break the string—fold music's wing.
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III.

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they.

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE.

I.

JUNE was not over,
Though past the full,
And the best of her roses
Had yet to blow,
When a man I know
(But shall not discover,
Since ears are dull,
And time discloses)

Turned him and said with a man's true air,
Half sighing a smile in a yawn, as 'twere,—
“If I tire of your June, will she greatly
care?”

II.

Well, Dear, in-doors with you!
True, serene deadness
Tries a man's temper.

What's in the blossom
June wears on her bosom?
Can it clear scores with you?
Sweetness and redness.

Eadem semper!

Go, let me care for it greatly or slightly!
If June mends her bowers now, your hand
left unsightly
By plucking their roses,—my June will do
rightly.

III.

And after, for pastime,
If June be refulgent
With flowers in completeness,
All petals, no prickles,
Delicious as trickles
Of wine poured at mass-time,—
And choose One indulgent
To redness and sweetness:
Or if, with experience of man and of
spider,
She use my June-lightning, the strong insect-
ridder,
To stop the fresh spinning,—why, June will
consider.

MISCONCEPTIONS.

I.

THIS is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
'Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure.
Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet
hung to,—
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to !

II.

THIS is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went
on—
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent
on !

MAY AND DEATH.

I.

I WISH that when you died last May,
Charles, there had died along with you
Three parts of spring's delightful things ;
Ay, and, for me, the fourth part too.

II.

A foolish thought, and worse, perhaps !
There must be many a pair of friends
Who, arm in arm, deserve the warm
Moon-births and the long evening-ends.

III.

So, for their sake, be May still May !
Let their new time, as mine of old,
Do all it did for me : I bid
Sweet sights and sounds throng manifold.

IV.

Only, one little sight, one plant,
Woods have in May, that starts up green
Save a sole streak which, so to speak,
Is spring's blood, spilt its leaves between,—

/ v.

That, they might spare ; a certain wood
Might miss the plant ; their loss were
small :
But I,—whene'er the leaf grows there,
Its drop comes from my heart, that's all.

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA.

I.

I WONDER do you feel to-day
As I have felt, since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II.

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalised me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III.

Help me to hold it : first it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brick-work's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin : yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

IV.

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,—blind and green they grope

Among the honey-meal,—and last
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V.

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI.

Such life there, through such lengths of
hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting Nature have her way
While Heaven looks from its towers.

VII.

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above.
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more—

Nor yours, nor mine,—nor slave nor free!

Where does the fault lie? what the core
Of the wound, since wound must be?

IX.

I would I could adopt your will,

See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill

At your soul's springs,—your part, my
part

In life, for good and ill.

X.

No. I yearn upward—touch you close,

Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

XI.

Already how am I so far

Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,

Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII.

Just when I seemed about to learn!

Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—

Infinite passion and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

EARTH'S IMMORTALITIES.

FAME.

SEE, as the prettiest graves will do in time,
Our poet's wants the freshness of its prime ;
Spite of the sexton's browsing horse, the
sods
Have struggled thro' its binding osier-rods ;
Headstone and half-sunk footstone lean
awry,
Wanting the brick-work promised by-and-by ;
How the minute gray lichens, plate o'er
plate,
Have softened down the crisp-cut name and
date.

LOVE.

So, the year's done with !
(*Love me for ever !*)
All March begun with,
April's endeavour ;
May-wreaths that bound me
June needs must sever !
Now snows fall round me,
Quenching June's fever—
(*Love me for ever !*)

PROSPICE.

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts
denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the
storm,
The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible
form,
Yet the strong man must go :
For the journey is done and the summit
attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon
be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last !
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes
and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like
my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's
arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold. .

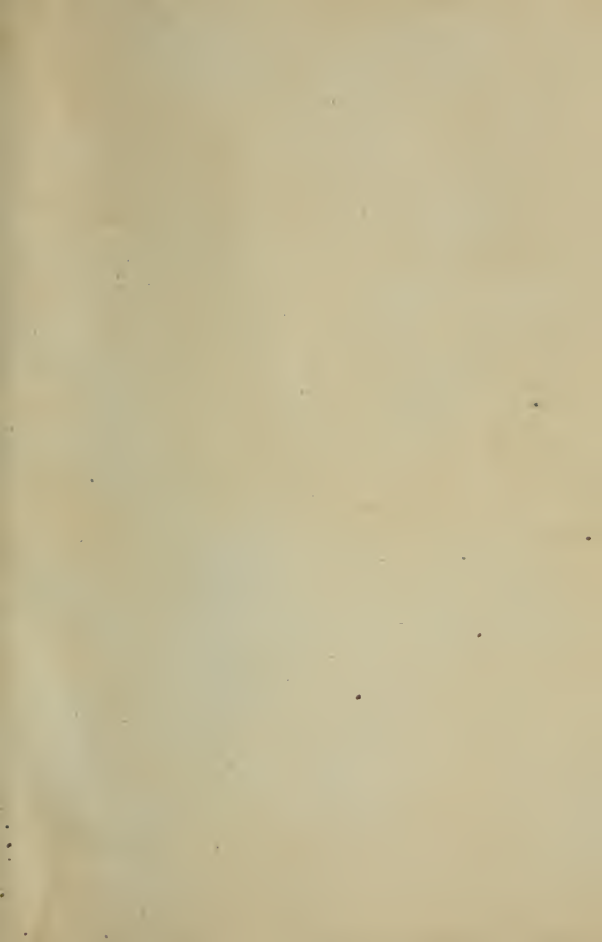
For sudden the worst turns the best to the
brave,

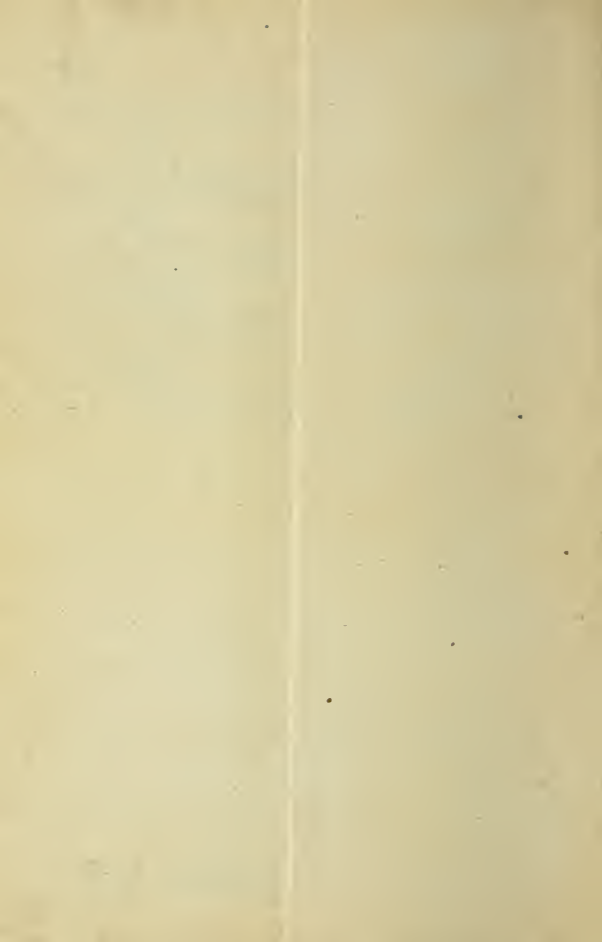
 The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that
rave,

 Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out
of pain,

 Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee
again,

 And with God be the rest !





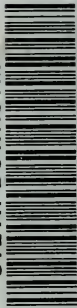
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